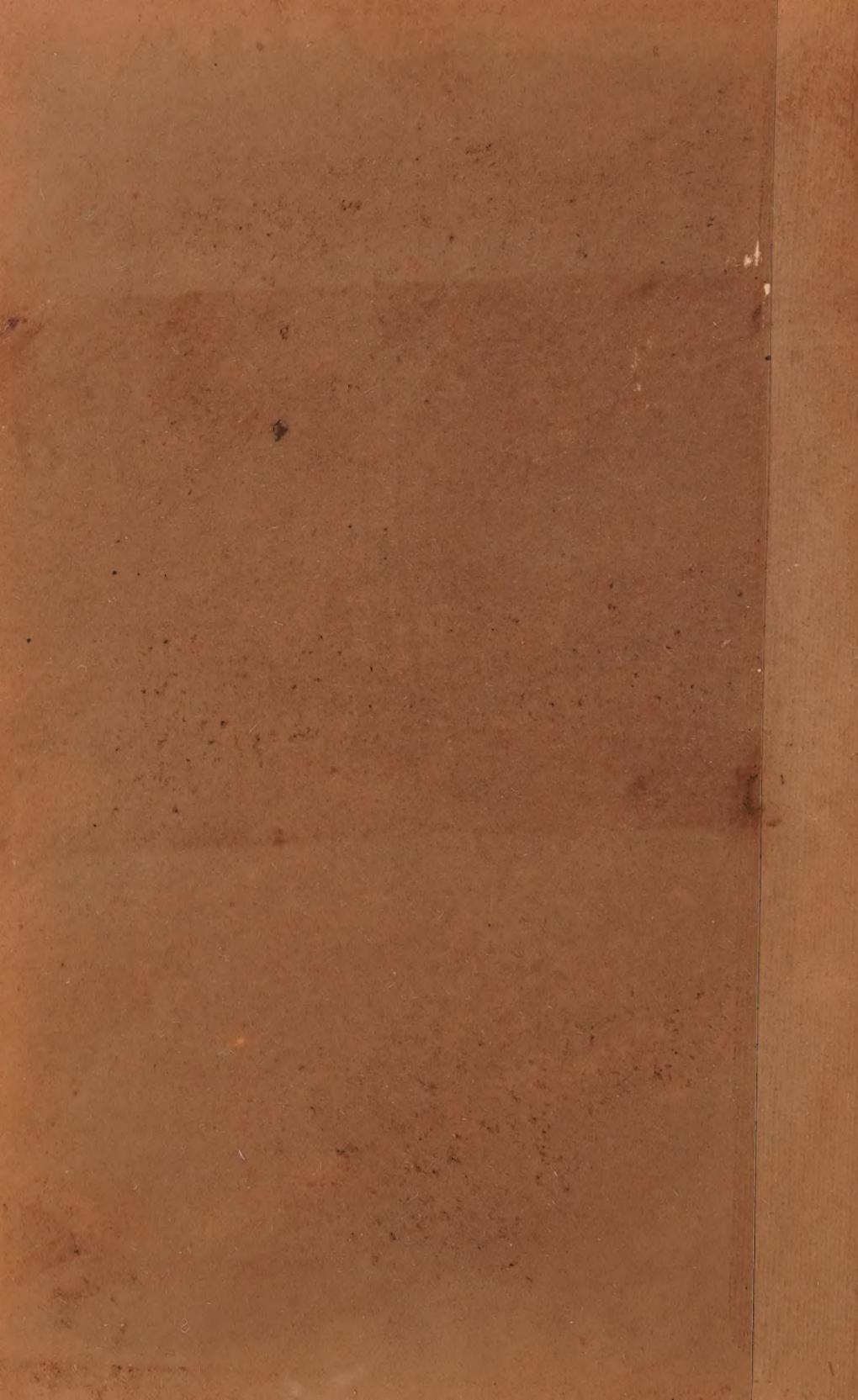
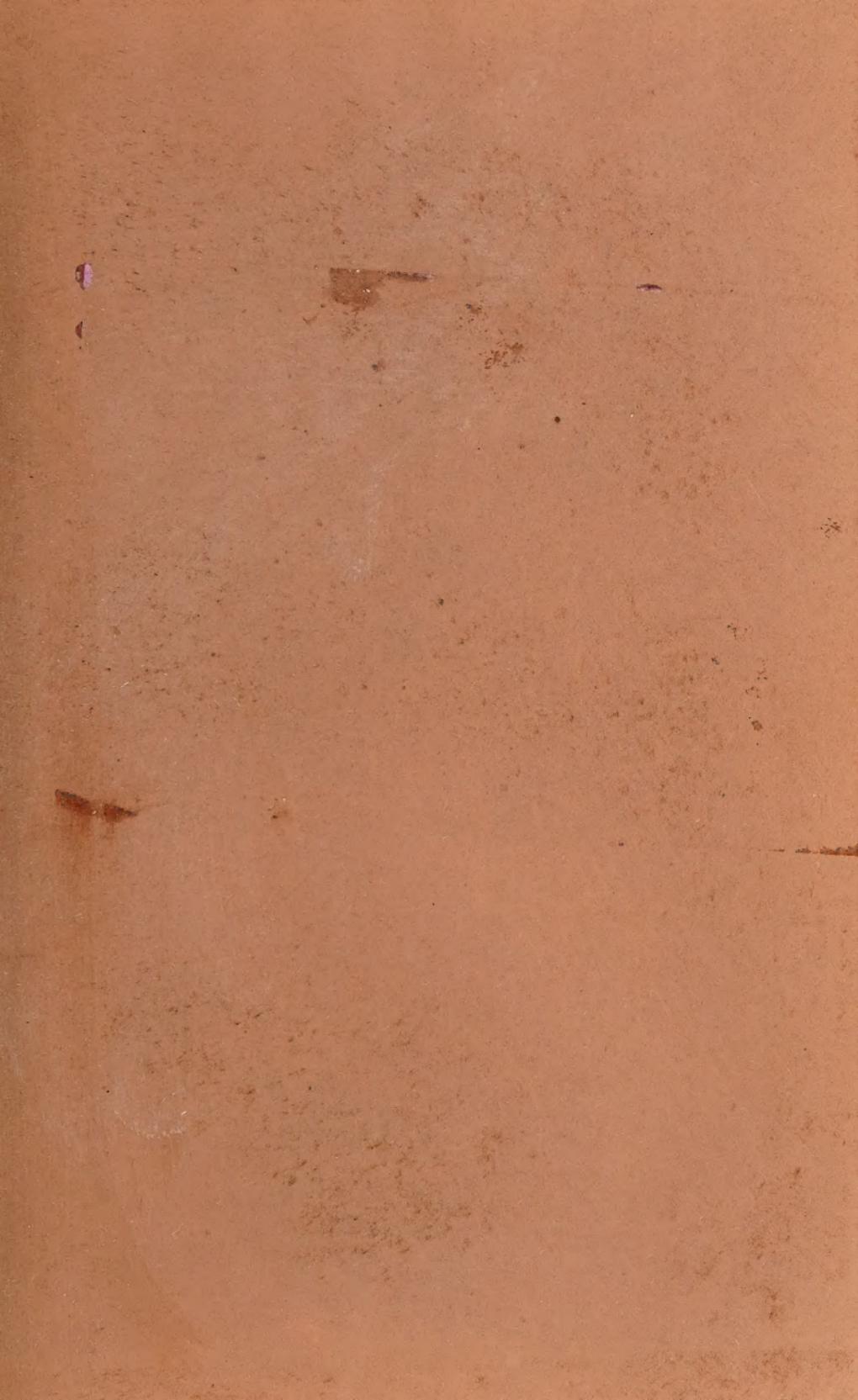


FANTOCCINI





(B)

FANTOCCINI.



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2025

FANTOCCINI.

BY

FRANK BARRETT.

“Here there is a show called *Fantoccini*, which hath for its Object the Amusement of the Idle, wherein a number of Puppets set forth a variety of short Plays—Sentimental and Heroick, Tragick and Comick, &c.—but with such Quaintness as rather to *burlesque* than to Realize the Manners and Emotions of Men.”

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LONDON :

TINSLEY BROTHERS, 8. CATHERINE STREET, STRAND.

1874.

[All rights of Translation and Reproduction are Reserved.]

PRINTED BY TAYLOR AND CO.,
LITTLE QUEEN STREET, LINCOLN'S INN FIELDS.

TO MY FRIEND

Lionel Brough,

I INSCRIBE THESE VOLUMES WITH FEELINGS OF AFFECTIONATE
REGARD AND ADMIRATION.

CONTENTS.

I.

	PAG R
FILOUBON	1

II.

ERIC	81
----------------	----

III.

SCHWARTZENSCHWEIN	145
-----------------------------	-----

IV.

UE	207
--------------	-----

Filibon,

AND THE LITTLE MARIE.



FANTOCCINI.

FILOUBON,

AND THE LITTLE MARIE.

MONSIEUR TROMBONE was a fine picturesque old soldier. He had lost a leg in the service of his country, and acquired a strategic ability worthy of the great general under whom he had fought. That general was Turenne, as every one in Gomarche had reason to know—for every one went at some time of the day to the ‘Soleil d’Or,’ and never without hearing Monsieur Trombone parade that one memorable fact of his existence. He was a man of great imaginative and inventive powers; but though vain, he disguised his poetical accomplishments under the sober garb of reality, and

in recounting his adventures mingled facts with his fictions so judiciously as to arouse the suspicion that he was not altogether a liar. Apart from his intellectual occupation, he was nominally a clockmaker; really, he did nothing but talk and drink. In the winter he sat in the chimney of the ‘Soleil d’Or,’ and looked after the fire; in the summer he sat in the porch of the ‘Soleil d’Or,’ and looked after the honeysuckle; at the same time, in both seasons he looked after himself.

Madame Trombone, in conformity with that great law of nature which mercifully provides that nothing perfectly useless shall live upon this earth, died when Trombone returned from the wars with his wooden leg and his pension. In his absence she had sustained his reputation—for she was as voluble and inventive as he—and with the assistance of an apprentice made a very snug and reliable business. So far she was useful, and lived. When Trombone returned he could sustain his own reputation, and the business required no more making; then Madame Trombone was perfectly useless.

Moreover, she was ugly. So she died—poor thing!—and her widower devoutly thanked his saint and Providence for the mercies that are inscrutable.

It was a marvel to the few, ignorant of Trombone's strategical attainments, how he, sitting all day in the 'Soleil d'Or,' could manage his business on the other side of the Place. But he did manage it, and in this wise.

First, however, suffer me to say between brackets as it were, that parental prerogative —a faint semblance and simulacrum of which still lingers in France—obtained to a very great degree a century and a half ago. Then in that paradise there was marriage and giving in marriage, and also, it is necessary to add, there was selling in marriage. A father's care was less engaged as to what he should make of his daughters than as to what he might make *by* them. Trombone contrived to make a very pretty two sous by his child.

It has been said that Madame Trombone made a business with the assistance of an apprentice. Now Pepin, the apprentice, in the

earlier part of his time, was simply engaged in selling the cheap jewellery forming madame's stock-in-trade, whilst the good woman did the household duties or sounded her husband's clarion in the ears of her friends. For the sake of variety she sometimes sat in the shop with her knitting, and set Pepin to make the beds and boil the soup. At this time he was fifteen, bright and ingenious. It was with the view of exercising his ingenuity that he elected to be a jeweller's apprentice ; little scope did he find in madame's establishment. Still, there were tools and appliances for repairing, and the like, exhibited in the window as a bait, and with these the lad amused himself in leisure moments.

One day a glorious funkey made his appearance in the shop ; he was come from the château of Monsieur le Marquis de la Grenouille-gonflée to bid Madame Trombone send a workman up to the château instantly. Monsieur le Marquis de la Grenouille-gonflée's clock was suffering from an internal disarrangement. Pepin was despatched on a forlorn hope. He

had seen but one clock before in his lifetime. The lame clock was put before him. He declared he could do nothing without his tools, and took the wondrous piece of mechanism home with him. He studied it for a whole day, and lay awake thinking about it the whole night. The following evening he returned the clock to the marquis, mended and in complete going order. From that time Madame Trombone was a clockmaker, and Pepin was continually making and repairing works of this kind. At eighteen he made a clock with a sentry-box on the top, from which an effigy of M. Trombone emerged, and saluted as many times as denoted the hour of day. It was the marvel of the province, and brought customers from far and wide. Pepin was bound for seven years, and when Trombone returned from the wars, three years of the apprenticeship were unexpired. As one in some way connected with the State, the old soldier felt bound to act up to the letter of the law; so he gave Pepin six sous per diem with bed and board, as the articles stipulated, and he gave him no

more. And now Pepin's time was up ; but still he stayed at the little shop, taking his six sous, and Trombone was not distressed with anxiety for the things of the morrow. He toiled not, neither did he mend clocks. For monsieur had a daughter, and she kept Pepin in his place.

Ye who have seen a vinegar-faced old maid snubbing a meek domestic, think not that Pepin was "kept in his place" by any such means, or by any such maid. The little Marie—Trombone's offspring—was ten years old when Pepin first saw her, and they had kissed each other morning and night, with no single interruption ever since. Until she was fifteen she used to sit on his knee. With her arm round his neck, she would try to comprehend the great schemes he had for making clocks of marvellous construction ; clocks without wheels, clocks without pendulums, clocks small enough to go in one's pocket, the weights whereof she innocently conceived were to be artfully concealed *dans les pantalons*. He made the prettiest trinkets for her ears and fingers. Neither

did anything without the knowledge of the other. They loved with the truest, simplest affection, and were inseparable. And Pepin was content to provide for M. Trombone's bodily and spiritual wants for six sous a day rather than part from his sister, so he called the little Marie; an arrangement with which her papa did not interfere. And this was how Monsieur Trombone managed his business.

Marie was returning from the market one day when the state-coach of Monsieur le Marquis de la Grenouillegonflée met and passed her. The marquis was looking from the window, and seeing pretty Marie, he puckered the wrinkles of his wicked old face into a ravishing leer. Marie flushed and laughed. This marquis looked so droll—exactly like Pierot in Filoubon's fantoccini show. Perhaps a little colour was in her cheeks, and the smile yet lingered in her eyes as she turned round to look after the lumbering equipage. The marquis was hanging out of the window, and appeared still more like Pierot as he kissed his hand to her. She laughed outright, and ran

home to tell Pepin. Pepin was sitting at his bench. He must have had a very troublesome job in hand, for he never looked up during the recital of this comic incident, and never smiled at what had amused Marie so mightily.

“I wonder what he meant by smiling at me?” Marie said naïvely, looking sideways at Pepin.

“He doesn’t know himself. Those rich folks always are fools,” said Pepin. The answer was not complimentary, and for that reason probably not satisfactory. For Marie left Pepin, and presently put the same question to the pretty little body she found reflected in her mirror. The reflection shook its bright little head at her, and seemed to say, “There’s no doubt about it, Marie, you’re the prettiest girl in Gomarche, and that’s why the marquis made himself so ridiculous.” She twisted herself sideways, holding up her round arms, better to see her figure; that inspection was satisfactory. Then, as she couldn’t twist the glass low enough, she pulled her short petticoats on one side, and looked at her ankles;

those, and her feet as well, were worthy of her new clocked stockings and her best high-heeled shoes. For the first time in her life she disagreed with Pepin's radical idea of aristocratic imbecility. Perhaps, after all, M. le Marquis de la Grenouillegonflée was not such a fool as he looked. Pepin was certainly very cross all the morning, and quiet to an unusual degree; and Marie felt, though she hardly knew why, that she was in some way concerned. Any doubt she had was dispelled in the afternoon. She was sitting with her work at the shop-door, when Pepin came and leant against the door-post.

"Marie, when the marquis smiled at you, did you smile at him?"

"Yes."

"Did he see you smile?"

"Yes."

"And what did he do then?"

"Why, he—he—he kissed his hand to me."

Marie flushed. She had left this detail out of her former narration. Pepin said nothing, but looked as black as a thundercloud. Marie

made a feeble attempt at indifference, and began to hum ; but she broke off suddenly in the first bar.

“ I don’t know why you should look angry, Pepin. There’s no harm in laughing, is there ? ”

“ Yes, there is.”

Marie rose immediately, and went to the door of the stairs.

“ Why are you going ? ” asked Pepin.

“ To avoid your displeasure, monsieur. I cannot help laughing when people make themselves ridiculous.”

Marie made a saucy curtsey, and ran upstairs, laughing sufficiently loud for Pepin to hear, and with what earnestness may be imagined by the fact that ten minutes afterwards she ran down in tears, and throwing her arms about Pepin’s neck, begged him to forgive his naughty little Marie. But though they were quite good friends again, they found that the old link of brotherly and sisterly love had been broken and was not restored ; but in its place what sweeter tie it was that bound them toge-

ther they yet hardly knew. Already they had felt the thorn concealed within the rosy wreath, and breathed its honey odour.

In the evening, as they walked through the meadow, they were very silent; and when, resting their arms upon the rail, they leant over the bridge looking into the water flowing down the mill-stream, they spoke not a word. The silence touched their hearts as never had their pleasantest conversations. Once, as Marie looked sideways at Pepin, she found him looking sideways at her. They both coloured, and resumed their study of the gudgeons struggling against the current in the stream beneath them. The gudgeons, influenced by Heaven knows what, turned tail and scuttled down with the stream. Pepin shifted a little nearer to Marie, and presently she felt his arm slide round her waist. He had never hesitated in doing this before; and she had never until now noticed the pleasantness of this kind of warm close girdle. She felt constrained to yield to its pressure; and so the two young heads met, and their glowing cheeks touched, while both

looked happy enough and pretty enough for a picture. And if a pre-Raphaelite should attempt this picture, I would have him depict the gudgeons carried away and tumbling head-over-heels under the mill-wheel.

There are certain people who, like certain insects, seem to have been sent on purpose to prevent our staying too long in the pleasant place they get into. M. le Marquis de la Grenouillegonflée was of this kind of people, and a lovers' Elysium was the pleasant place into which he crept. Pepin was gone to fit a lock at the other end of the village, and the little Marie was as usual sitting with her work at the door, when the awful Grenouillegonflée equipage made its appearance on the Place, and drew up before the clockmaker's shop. Marie flew to the door at the back of the shop, and waited with a palpitating heart in the passage; but presently she was compelled to emerge from her refuge, for the dreadful old marquis was thumping the floor with his crutch with what vehemence his withered old muscles

could command. Pale as a shade, and with not the vestige of a smile on her face, Marie stood before him, whilst he leered and gabbled and chuckled over the confusion he saw in the poor girl's face. At length he professed to want a ring. Marie laid some before him, from which he selected one, and fumbled it about upon his finger.

"See, my pretty, pretty, pretty, how love affects me, even to my finger-tips. Prithee do with your fair fingers what Cupid will not permit mine to do." The marquis stretched out his palsied hand.

Marie hesitated. If she did not put the ring on, this dreadful old man would make it an excuse for staying ever so much longer ; if she did put it on, she would have to tell Pepin, and perhaps that would make him jealous. She was perplexed. The marquis had been in the shop ten minutes, and Madame Lechat, the village gossip, had already passed thrice. Madame Lechat, with her long nose, passing for the fourth time, decided her ; she pushed the ring down the marquis's finger. The old sin-

ner clasped her hand in his and drew it to his lips ; she snatched it away, and looked to the door to see if Madame Lechat had seen this. In the doorway stood Pepin.

* * *

The following morning, as M. Trombone was preparing to get a little fresh air, as he was pleased to term his diurnal visit to the 'Soleil d'Or,' Pepin touched his arm, and said :

" Monsieur, may I speak one word with you ? "

" Why not, my good Pepin ? Turenne has listened to Turenne's Trombone ; why should not Trombone listen to Trombone's Pepin ? "

" Monsieur, my term of service has expired."

" M-o-n Dieu ! "

" I am anxious for the future."

" Be tranquil, my child. Fear not. You are a good boy, and Turenne's Trombone suffers not merit to remain unrecognised. You shall go on as if your indentures were binding on me for ever, my little cabbage ! "

" Monsieur, I desire to wed the little Marie."

“ My God ! I am electrified ! ”

“ Monsieur, we love each other.”

“ What money have you saved from your income ? ” asked M. Trombone, after vainly struggling to multiply six sous a day by seven years.

“ None.”

“ Peste ! ”

“ It costs me all for clothes.”

“ You must be less extravagant. You must save, my good Pepin, and then, in about five or six years, we shall see, we shall see. Good morning, my good—”

“ But, monsieur, one moment. I have other views.”

“ It is impossible ! ”

“ I desire to wed Marie next Sunday.”

M. Trombone’s natural leg gave under him. He would have sunk to the earth but for the rigidity of his wooden limb. Pepin continued :

“ When we are married we shall go to Paris.”

“ This infant is insane,” said Trombone to himself. “ Who will pay for the journey ? ” he added to Pepin.

“We shall walk !”

“A million leagues ! My God, a fine marriage trip !”

“I shall pay expenses by working on the way.”

“How much will there be left for Turenne’s Trombone ? And between us, my charming little butterfly, when do you think of returning ?”

“When my fortune is made.”

“Ah ! poor babe, these detestable clocks have softened his brain. The devil though, it is inconvenient for me,” thought the old soldier.—“Pepin, suppose I say this is unwise ; I cannot suffer my daughter to marry you ; what then ?”

“Monsieur, I shall walk to Paris by myself.”

“But suppose I say, Pepin, you shall marry the little Marie provided that you take her not from beneath the roof of her fond father, nor her fond father from beneath the roof of the ‘Soleil d’Or’ ?”

“I will answer to-morrow.”

“And I, my Pepin, shall be prepared to

offer—or not—to-morrow. And now, for the sake of St. Cécile, suffer me to get a breath of fresh air. I choke, I burn ; my vitals are like brier-stems within me. *Allons !*”

During the day M. Trombone was inspired ; and the next morning met Pepin with the face of a fat lamb and the eyes of a fox.

“Pepin !”

“Monsieur.”

“What is my daughter, my sweet, my angelic Marie—what is she worth ?”

“Ten million worlds !”

M. Trombone embraced Pepin with tears in his eyes.

“Pepin, although Turenne’s right hand, I am no scholar, but reckoning a world to be worth two sous, would ten million be equivalent to a thousand livres, think you ?”

“Truly.”

“Then go, my spiritual infant, and bring me which you choose, the worlds or the livres, and then the little Marie shall be yours.”

“How long will you give me to procure them ?”

“One year.”

“Monsieur, it shall be done. A notary shall make out the agreement.”

* * *

Pepin made up his bundle, and the little Marie helped him—that is, she increased its bulk with innumerable useless things that might serve him in some remote emergency, and refreshed him in his labours with tender kisses and caresses. She bore up bravely during the day, her eyes only twinkling now and then, which they will do as well with a smile as with a tear. Why should she cry when her own brave good Pepin was going to earn fame, and bring back money enough to make her his wife? This was the question she repeated to herself again and again and again, until Nature answered, telling her that she was a foolish little woman, with a heart even softer than her head. Then her head gave up the contest, and her heart had it all its own way, and sufficient ado had Pepin to kiss her tears away after that.

M. Trombone never rose before the ‘Soleil

d'Or'; and as Pepin was to rise the next day with the other and earlier rising sun, the parting between Turenne's Trombone and Trombone's Pepin took place over night. M. Trombone was dramatically pathetic, and his feelings were considerably intensified by his being in liquor at the time. When Pepin opened his door the next morning, he found sitting there fast asleep the little Marie. The poor girl had tossed about in her bed for an hour after parting with her lover, and then it seemed to her that the morning must be close at hand, and that she had been lying there the whole night. How terrible it would be if the fatigue should overcome her, and she should be asleep when Pepin departed! She rose and dressed herself in the dark, and crept along to Pepin's door. He was not stirring yet; but her mind was infinitely relieved. It was so pleasant to be near the one she loved so much. She looked from the window; but no light streaks told of the approaching morning. She sat down by the door, and thought about Pepin for hours, until at last, when the morn-

ing light touched the horizon, sleep closed the eyelids of Pepin's watching angel, and she slept.

Pepin hesitated. Should he leave without awaking her, and spare her the pain of separation? A suspicion of the truth decided him not to do this. When, taking her head between his hands he kissed it, she said hastily, whilst her hands clutched his nervously,

“ Yes, yes, my dearie, I am awake—I am awake ! ”

She was not pretty this morning, for her face was swollen and distorted with fatigue and grief; and she was not smart as she was wont to be. She used to wear a little finery at every available point of her person—she being one of those pretty gay creatures who can wear, without looking vulgar, any quantity of ornament. This morning not even her earrings were graced by being worn. It seemed as though she were mourning already for the lover she was to lose.

Pepin walked ten miles and began to feel hungry. He sat beneath an apple-tree by the

way-side, and opened his bundle. He took out the embroidered handkerchief that Marie had insisted upon his taking, and which she prized as the most costly article of her wardrobe. Apparently kissing it gave him appetite, for he presently turned his attention to a loaf with avidity: that too, Marie had put in. He broke it in half, but hungry as he was he did not eat. For there, in the middle of the loaf, lay Marie's ear-rings and her brooch and her three rings, and every gimerack she possessed except the watch Pepin made and had given her the day before. Perhaps altogether these things were worth twelvepence; but the dear little soul, when she put them there, thought she was providing against the greatest poverty that might come to her sweetheart. Would any degree of want and privation induce him to part with them?

Pepin found work pretty readily in the villages on his route, and entered Rouen with sixty sous in his pocket. But in the city he found no work, for the citizens had plenty of resident clockmakers, and the clockmakers had

plenty of workmen. So he went out of Rouen with a heavier heart and a lighter pocket. At length he reached Paris, and presenting himself before the chief watchmaker, asked for employment.

“What can you do?” asked M. Pendule.

“Anything,” answered modest Pepin.

M. Pendule was a Frenchman, and tolerant of bumpitiousness.

He was himself bumpitious.

“I will give you a chance, young man. I myself am risen from nothing. I had a chance. Regard this clock : it is the most perfect in the world. I made it. It has only one fault—it will not go. Remedy the defect, and I will engage you at two livres a week.”

That evening the clock acted superbly, and Pepin was engaged. The letter conveying this intelligence to the little Marie was read with joyful emotion by the faithful girl ; and Turenne’s Trombone systematically intoxicated himself.

In nine months Pepin saved sixty-eight livres.

Thus he had but to get nine hundred and thirty-two in the following two months.

Some would have despaired.

Pepin was young ; more than that, he was French : he did not despair.

* * *

At that time there were in Paris two eccentric English virtuosos—collectors of curiosities—a M. Smissé and a M. Jaunez.

These hated each other as only insulars can.

One day M. Jaunez had bought, at the market of Smiffel, a quadroon wife ; she was almost black. The next day M. Smissé bought a negress ; she was quite black.

These men had come to Paris and brought with them their rivalry ; also they brought with them their gold.

M. Jaunez purchased a Strasbourg clock. Its top was adorned with a stage. On this, at every hour, a garden sprang up, in which, half-concealed by a bush, stood Adam and Eve. Various beasts then crossed, and Adam nodded his head as if in the act of naming them. When the beasts had passed, the whole sank beneath the stage. It was a marvel of workmanship.

M. Smissé was insane when he heard of M. Jaunez's treasure.

One morning he was attracted to a window by a curious piece of clock-work. On the top of the clock was a sentry-box; at the hour the door opened, a sentry issued, cocked, presented, and fired his musket, shouldered it, and returned within his sentry-box, the door of which immediately closed.

This work was Pepin's.

The insulary rushed into the shop.

M. Pendule was composing a sonnet. He was a poet.

A poet can do anything. M. Pendule made clocks that did everything but go, and sonnets that did anything but sell.

What matter? He still made clocks and sonnets.

Giants regardlessly step over obstacles that pygmies never surmount.

To return.

M. Smissé with difficulty made himself understood. M. Pendule saw what was wanted instantaneously.

"You desire a machine that shall eclipse the affair of M. Jaunez?"

"Entirely," said M. Smissé. "His beasts only slide over, and Adam merely turns his head half round. Now, if you could make my Adam's head turn round completely, and my beasts *walk* across—"

"Wagging their tails," suggested M. Pendule.

"That would be perfection truly," replied the Englishman with enthusiasm. "Can you achieve this?"

"This and more, monsieur."

"And the price?"

"I will tell you to-morrow."

M. Smissé departed in an ecstasy of joy, and M. Pendule called to him, Pepin.

"Pepin!"

"Monsieur."

"I desire a clock. Upon it grows a flowering plain. On one side stands M. Noah beside his ark. Across the flowery mead there winds a procession of beasts, and of birds, and of fishes. They enter the ark walking and

gracefully waving their tails. M. Noah follows and shuts the door. The rain descends, and waters cover the surface of the stage. The ark rocks upon the waves. M. Noah opens a window, waving his handkerchief, and revolving his head as the curtain falls upon the interesting tableau."

"Monsieur, I will do this."

"And the cost, Pepin?"

"One thousand livres, independent of assistants and material—these to be furnished by you."

"Pepin, do you know what you say?"

"Monsieur, as well as what you ask."

Upon these terms Pepin commenced his labours the following morning.

M. Smissé was willing to pay two thousand livres to enrage the soul of M. Jaunez.

* * *

One night as Pepin was returning from his work he observed a crowd, and discovered that the object of their curiosity was a mountebank who was playing the tabor, while six young girls upon stilts went through their curious

evolutions. The mountebank, whose eye was continually roving round the crowd to see if any new-comer was desirous of contributing to his support, no sooner beheld Pepin than he terminated his performance, and threw himself into the arms of the young mechanic.

The mountebank was Filoubon—one of the cleverest, pleasantest, most unprincipled rascals in the world. He was known and welcomed in every village of France. He was trusted in none. He robbed one place and spent the plunder in the next. The talented Filoubon family consisted of six charming young ladies. In all probability these pretty girls, like Filoubon's respectable breeches, had been stolen and were for sale. For the past ten years not one of the Mesdemoiselles Filoubon had been younger than fifteen years, and not one older than eighteen. No one seeing the family one year would recognize them the next but for the presence of Filoubon and his assertion of paternal rights.

Besides these, there were in many villages many girls both old and young whom Filoubon

might lawfully have affiliated. Their features would have proved the equity of his claim ; this was partly why he did not claim them. Filoubon was not what one may call pretty or handsome. Again, some were too young and some were too old for professional purposes, and to avoid invidious distinction, he relinquished the charming creatures to the villages he honoured by populating. Again, my faith ! how could one man have reconciled those mothers ?

With all this, there was not a soul from Lorraine to Gascony who would have prosecuted merry Filoubon. What girl will give a kiss, and what girl resent one being taken by a merry fellow ? He had robbed Pepin, and now he threw his arms about his neck embracing him affectionately.

A Frenchman can be grateful under any circumstances.

“ M. Filoubon, where is the watch you stole from me ? ”

“ M. Pepin, where is the perfume of the autumn’s rose ? ”

“Filoubon, it is wrong.”

“Pepin, I will make it all right. Have you dined?”

“No.”

“Be of my company. We dine here—at once.”

“I will.”

“Come, then.” Filoubon then introduced Pepin to his family and the chief room in the ‘L’Oie Verte’.

“M. Pepin, what shall it be?—vermicelli, to follow with turbot, and duck with—”

“What you will.”

“Nay, you are my guest. Here is the garçon; order what you will.”

After the dinner followed dessert, with wines of superb quality, and sprightly conversation, in which the Mesdemoiselles Filoubon^{es} shone greatly.

“This is reparation!” thought Pepin; and, elated, he became garrulous. He told of his wonderful clock, and the reward in store for him. Filoubon could hardly credit the wonders he heard.

“I will show to you a part of it,” said Pepin.

“You are too good,” said Filoubon.

“I will show you the figure of Monsieur Noah, with the revolving head. But, ah! you rogue, you will rob me of it.”

“If I lay my finger upon it, may I expire!”

“I will fetch it. Pardon me; I will be absent but five minutes.”

Pepin ran to his workshop, and speedily returned with the admirable figure of Noah. The Filoubon family was not in the dining-room. He hastened downstairs to make inquiries, and was met by the garçon.

“Monsieur Pepin!”

“I am he.”

“The bill.”

“For what?”

“Dinner of eight parties, with dessert and superb wines.”

“But Filoubon?”

“Commanded me to beg your excuse of him. He has an appointment at the hour.”

Whilst Filoubon was robbing Pepin in Paris, M. le Marquis de la Grenouillegonflée was doing his utmost to rob him in Gomarche.

* *

After Pepin's departure M. Trombone's best customer was M. Trombone. He drew the most valuable articles from his stock-in-trade, and through the mediation of a carrier who went once a month to Rouen, procured from a Jew in that city sufficient money to supply his daughter with bread and himself with liquor. Other customers had he none. In this he presently saw the hand of Providence ; for had customers come he should have been able to sell them nothing. Literally his business was going to rack and Rouen. He hoped for better things. Every day the Marquis de la Grenouillegonflée spent an hour in his shop, turning over the emaciated stock and talking to little Marie, and every day Trombone said to himself, "Truly Monsieur le Marquis will buy now ;" and, going over the few articles, he put such prices on them as would remunerate him for the trouble inflicted

on his daughter. But M. le Marquis never saw any necessity to buy, and, which was more, never laid out a sou. His visits were an ordeal to the little Marie, and once she thought of writing of her troubles to Pepin; but the thought that he was battling for her inspired her with courage to fight for him, and she wrote not a word that could dishearten him. The day before he left he arranged a counter, with a hidden bolt, behind which Marie could sit secure from any personal advances of the marquis, and she tried to make indifference a bar between her ears and his tongue. Despite all which, the marquis contrived to give her endless annoyance. Frequently she complained to her father, and he, whilst there was a faint hope that the wealthy old brute would spend something, lent a deaf ear to these complaints, and bade his daughter remember that deference and submission to the noble were the primal duties of the lowly. But when in course of time this faint hope expired of inanition, M. Trombone cursed the aristocracy, and bade his daughter wait until

he had matured a plan by which to thwart this arrogant villain, and revenge the foul insult offered to the child of Turenne's poor but virtuous Trombone.

Very often, when one's looking for wild strawberries, one finds a nettle. Inversely something like this happened to M. Trombone. Whilst cogitating as to how he might best punish the marquis for insulting Marie and buying nothing, it occurred to him that a more amiable policy might be more remunerative.

“My child,” he said to the little Marie one morning, “you shall not be subjected to Monsieur le Marquis’s blandishments this day. Betake yourself for a walk. I will superintend the establishment.”

After Trombone had sat for some time on the watch—a term not to be misunderstood, every article of clock-work having long since disappeared from the shop—his perseverance was rewarded by the appearance of M. le Marquis. The terrible Trombone saluted him à la militaire. The venerable villain was at first disconcerted in finding the lion where he

looked for a lamb ; but the lion was so bland and amiable that the wolf presently regained his equanimity, and asked to see some rings.

“Monseigneur, my rings are unworthy of your fingers. Spare me the humiliation of seeing my own poor diamonds eclipsed by the magnificent lustre of your resplendent knuckles.”

“I will purchase one for my lacquey.”

M. Trombone cursed himself for having sent away the last grimerack that very morning.

“Monseigneur, I expire with regret ! They are locked up, and my daughter—”

“The little Marie—the lovely Marie !”

“Maman de Moïse ! Is my child deserving of monseigneur’s notice ? Would she were here now ! But, alas ! she has gone to get Father Pierre to write a letter to her intended.”

“Her intended !”

“The worthy, the respectable Pepin, monseigneur.”

“Hélas !”

“The dear boy is in Paris, commanding his own terms. He will return in two months.”

"Monsieur Trombone, your lovely child should aspire to one higher than a mechanic."

"Monseigneur, the child is lovely, I admit; and she is good."

"Ha!"

"And young."

"Ho!"

"And innocent."

M. le Marquis smacked his lips.

"Good also is Pepin. What should I say against him? The noble infant will give me one thousand livres to compensate me for the loss of my little Marie."

"A thousand livres! My God!" said the marquis; and without another word he shuffled out to his carriage.

* * *

In Butter's or Mavor's spelling-book is an instructive story of a young and foolish fish who, after wisely leaving the hook, unwisely returns to bolt the bait. Unfortunately the marquis and Butter or Mavor were unacquainted, or he might have profited by the story, and kept clear of that artful angler, M.

Trombone, so saving himself much subsequent pain.

One may see right into the jeweller's shop from the porch of the 'Soleil d' Or,' so there sat Trombone dreamily smoking his pipe, yet keenly alive to sport. He was hopeful as anglers are. He knew the tempting nature of his daughter, and the fishy nature of the marquis. He was not surprised when the familiar vehicle appeared ; only his eye brightened, and he puffed a little quicker. For several days he suffered his victim to nibble, and then he struck. Having polished his buttons, and his wooden leg, and powdered his wig, he presented himself at the Château de la Grenouille gonflée.

"Monseigneur !—Behold before you the proudest, humblest, happiest, and most wretched man in Gomarche!"

M. le Marquis raised his eye-brows.

"Monseigneur!—The great Turenne's Trombone has heard of your frequent visits to his humble establishment, and of the attentions you pay his daughter, and he is over-

powered with joy and pride at so great an honour.

“But Gomarche is censorious, and circumstances over which the veteran has no control forbid the continuance of such perfect felicity.

“Monseigneur!—Shortly my unfortunate daughter’s betrothed will return with the thousand livres that shall save Turenne’s Trombone from annihilation by the merciless maître of the ‘Soleil d’Or’. Reflect that if he finds the little Marie’s heart estranged, he will renounce her, and that then my ruin will be complete. I pray you, for my sake, to forego the honours you are diurnally heaping upon my miserable head.” Trombone wept; but the marquis remained unmoved. “Let me entreat you, moreover, for my child’s sake. In mercy to her forbear to dazzle her eyes with the majesty of your condition, and to break her heart with a futile passion inspired by your wit and personal attractions!”

“What—what—what say you? She loves me! Does she love me?”

"O monseigneur, force me not to betray a secret she struggles so fearfully to conceal."

"O the angel, the divinity, the little cat!"

"Monseigneur!—Calm yourself. Remember you speak to the father of my future son-in-law's wife."

"The wife of another—never? She shall be mine!"

"But I cannot part with my child and the livres at the same time."

"I will double the amount Pepin offers. Now will you have her or leave her?"

"Have her or liv-res? O, the latter if you please," replied Trombone.

He was bad enough even for a joke of this kind. As both understood each other, they quickly settled the terms of agreement. Trombone, to make matters perfectly comfortable, arranged with M. Rouge and M. Noir, two intimate friends, to waylay Pepin on his return from Paris and rob him of his money. By this means Pepin, by inability to fulfil his part of the contract, would have no claim on the hand of the little Marie. Trom-

bone was so certain of success, that he would have married his daughter to the marquis there and then but for one difficulty, and this was, that Marie declared she would have nothing to do with the scheme, farther than marring it to the best of her ability. The bond between Trombone and Pepin was an impediment to a marriage within the year, which Marie vowed to declare if a notary were brought before her for hymeneal purposes. It was determined therefore to postpone the ceremony until after Pepin's discomfiture, and meanwhile as fears were entertained that Marie would be found wanting in filial respect and not found when wanting in another respect, she was privately removed from the insecurity of the paternal roof to the Château de la Grenouille gonflée, in which were several apartments where a young lady might be put under lock-and-key, and kept in that condition until required.

Now Filoubon, who was then in Gomarche, and the two vagabonds engaged to burke Pepin, had a mutual friend. This common *fidus*

obtained the favour of each by imparting to one the secrets intrusted to him by the other. If two of a trade cannot agree, far less can three; so when Filoubon heard of the commission received by Messrs. Rouge and Noir he hated them with a good hate. Also he hated Trombone, for he was piqued at this preference given to rascals whom he knew to be his inferiors under Mercury. Forthwith he departed from Gomarche with his troupe, and a full determination to frustrate his enemies.

* * *

Behold now M. Smissé with the most wonderful clock in Paris, M. Jaunez with the spleen, and Pepin with a girdleful of gold on his way to Gomarche and Marie.

Pepin travelled by the diligence, for his gold was heavy, and his concern for its safety great. The lamps were being suspended in the streets as the vehicle—half-diligence, half-carrier's waggon—rumbled into Trevalle; and the porte-cochère of the inn at which the travellers were to rest for the night was a-glow with the light streaming into it from

the salle-à-manger. The day had been damp, and the passengers taciturn, so Pepin was not displeased to exchange his moist musty seat in the coupé for a corner in the warm salle and the cheerful society it contained. A capital dinner had been prepared for the travellers, and this absorbed Pepin's attention for some time. There was much laughter and noisy talk, for some twenty or thirty soldiers were billeted on the inn, and in their midst was Filoubon narrating his drollest adventures, and exchanging the smartest badinage with those who chose to comment upon his performance. When Pepin discovered his presence he was not well pleased; but he conceived that Filoubon, in consideration of the nefarious action with which he had concluded their last meeting, would be glad to avoid his victim. But such was not the case. Filoubon was a good Christian in this respect—he forgot old injuries, and did unto others as he would have them do unto him. It is, however, necessary to observe that this state of feeling was dependent on

his being the uninjured party in the first case, and his requiring forgiveness in the second. He presently crossed to Pepin and embraced him with the utmost fervour ; and, as if nothing had occurred to alter their friendship. How can one accuse such a man of rascality ! Presently he was picking the framework of Pepin's duck, and washing down the fragments with the remainder of his half-bottle of Bordeaux, keeping up a lively chatter meanwhile. The innkeeper was extremely attentive, and brought a bottle of Burgundy for Pepin's approval ; and whilst that prudent youth was considering whether it was advisable to drink more, having so much wealth dependent on his vigilant care, his companion whipped off the bottle-neck and filled his glass. The liquor was good ; and Pepin becoming less frigid and quite philosophical, remarked, as the obsequious innkeeper withdrew after begging to know if monsieur would desire his bed to be warmed, "This fat old rascal forgets how he refused me lodging when I was walking

to Paris. My faith, it is something to travel by a diligence."

"Who would not be kind to a man who can't sit comfortably for the quantity of gold in his pockets? Naturally, this innkeeper desires to make you more comfortable; and not only he. I know two gentlemen who have walked all the way from Gomarche to help you with your burden."

"Gomarche! What do you know of Gomarche?"

"All. I left the belle village a fortnight since."

"And Marie—"

"Is about to be married."

Pepin's bottom jaw fell. Filoubon emptied his glass.

"To whom?" gasped Pepin, when his jaw could close.

"Monsieur le Marquis de la Grenouille-gonflée."

Pepin laid his head on the table and groaned, "Ah! Marie, Marie, art thou false!"

"No," answered Filoubon with composure.

“ What say you, Filoubon, my dear good friend ? ”

“ Marie loves you as I love this Burgundy.”

“ But she is going to marry ! ”

“ Pardon. I said she is going to be married.”

“ Ah ! I see—the marquis has stolen her and bribed Trombone.”

“ Poor Trombone ! would for thee I could bear thy misfortune.”

“ Trombone is a thief, and M. le Marquis de la Grenouillegonflée is a robber ! ”

“ And honest Filoubon is a brigand, and M. Pepin is a purloiner.”

“ Monsieur ! ”

“ My dear friend, you rob M. Smissé of one thousand livres for a clock that will not go ; M. Trombone robs M. le Marquis of two thousand livres for a wife who will not stop with him ; M. le Marquis robs Marie of a sweetheart ; and honest Filoubon—my God ! of what does he rob his dear good friend Pepin ? ”

“ And the two friends you mentioned ? ”

“ They also are of our profession. Brigands

both ; but, comparatively, strangers to you. My faith, it is marvellous what friends you wealthy command.”

“ I am really very greatly obliged to you, M. Filoubon, for advising them of my wealth.”

“ You owe me no thanks, sweet Pepin. *I* am not interested in your ability or inability to claim the little Marie. If ever you reach Gomarche, you may thank M. Trombone. He it is whom you have to thank for the attentions of the friends.”

“ Where are these two rascals ? ”

“ Outside. You may hope to see them before you go to bed, as well as after.”

“ Filoubon, be serious.”

“ Do you think it a serious matter ? ”

“ Truly.”

“ Serious enough to require Filoubon for an ally.” Pepin remembered the story of the mouse who went into partnership with a cat ; also, he recalled Filoubon’s behaviour in the affair of the ‘L’Oie Verte.’ He was silent. Whilst he hesitated two peasants entered the room, and Filoubon rising, said. “ Those are

the friends I mentioned : he with the green shade over his eye is M. Rouge ; the one with the irregular nose is M. Noir. They have been lingering about this village ten days for you."

"How do you know ?"

"Because I, too, have been hanging about here with the same view for the last fortnight. I shall see you presently my good Pepin." He rose and crossed to Messrs. Rouge and Noir, who had a bottle which he assisted them in emptying. He talked gaily and loudly ; but Pepin knew he had made them aware of his presence, and more than once he detected the eyes of the two rascals scanning him furtively. And now Pepin began to feel nervous, and wished he had accepted Filoubon's offer of alliance, fearing, with all his self-confidence, that he was hardly a match for the three cunning vagabonds. Not that he dreaded the personal result of combat ; he trembled to think that if he lost his hard-earned money, he should lose Marie also.

When their bottle was emptied Messrs. Rouge and Noir began yawning and stretching,

and presently he of the broken nose said to the innkeeper,

“We are sleepy; what apartment can we have?”

“Messieurs may have the loft over the stable.”

“My word, man!” said Rouge with much show of indignation; do you think we are *canaille* because our clothes are stained with honest labour? We will have your best apartment, the pink chamber.

“Monsieur, that is engaged.”

“By whom?”

“The monsieur yonder,” as the innkeeper pointed to him, “Pepin,” observed M. Rouge pressing his heel upon the toe of M. Noir.

“We will have the blue room.”

“That also is engaged, but I have no doubt the gentleman will share it.” The innkeeper looked around for Filoubon, but M. Noir, rising with an oath, swore he would be under an obligation to no man, and that they would go on to the ‘Vierge’ and rest there. Rouge would have stayed, but Noir was surly and imperative, and the two with considerable

noise left the room, very much to Pepin's satisfaction, who felt that at any rate he would be safe for the night.

"Where are *we* to lie?" asked one of the soldiers.

"Gentlemen, you may dispose yourselves where you can."

The heat of the room and his dinner made Pepin drowsy, and calling for his chamber-light, he rose to go.

Filoubon came to him and said, "You retire early, my dear infant, and am I to understand that you decline my assistance; or will you sleep in my room?"

"Monsieur, I think I can protect myself. Your friends have gone to the 'Virgin'."

"And may return."

"Ha ! ha ! you may be sure I will barricade myself," replied Pepin with a laugh, and nodding with very good humour, departed, thinking within himself that he was decidedly smart and clever. His hand was upon the handle of the door when he felt a touch upon his shoulder. He turned. Filoubon was by

his side, holding his finger up to enjoin silence. He whispered,

“I am no morose ; though you decline my assistance, take my advice. Before you barricade your door look under your bed.”

He turned about and ran downstairs ; he carried his boots in his hands, and his motions were as swift and noiseless as a cat’s.

Pepin felt as if cold water were trickling down his back, and his first impulse was to run down after Filoubon, but reason suggested that the mountebank might be acting a part, and that the three friends were waiting at the stair-foot to kidnap him. He turned the handle and entered his room. The opening of the door almost extinguished his candle ; it was as if some one had blown his candle. The room was large, cold, and sufficiently dreadful-looking for the worst possibilities. Pepin looked towards the bed. The miserable light was sufficient to reveal a great square mass of thick faded hangings. The curtains alone were capacious enough to effectually conceal two men. The bed was large enough to

accommodate a family, and a thick valance swept the floor. A table and chair stood near. Pepin set down the candle. But he could not screw his courage to look at once under the dreadful bed. To allay suspicion he began to whistle; his composition was entirely original, for he could remember no tune, so occupied was his mind with the situation. What should he do now? To begin with—should he shut the door? He knew there was one thief with his boots off outside; might there not be three? Yet, if he shut it, might not Filoubon fasten it outside, and secure a victim for his two friends under the bed? That would be pleasant! And how about those bed curtains? He shoved the chair towards them, sat down, and brushed his arm against them. There was nothing behind them on that side. He looked out at the open door; there was something white, like a face, in the darkness; it disappeared as he looked. His hair bristled about his ears, and he could hear the blood throbbing in his veins. He would have raised an alarm and brought the

soldiers and the innkeeper to settle all doubts, but that he was a Frenchman, with a Frenchman's dread of being laughed at. He continued wildly with his siffilation and kicked off a boot, still with his glittering eye fixed on the black void beyond the door. He kicked off the other boot; and then reflected that proceeding in this way he should presently find himself in bed, with the regions beneath unexplored. The light was on the further side of the table, which, intercepting the rays, kept the valance in deep shadow. He noiselessly changed its position and glanced down. One corner of the valance strangely protruded. What should he do if on lifting it he found a head or a foot? He might escape by the door before the possessor of the head or foot could get at him, supposing Filoubon were not barring the door. Good Heavens! there was that white patch in the dark again. He looked for other means of escape. There were three windows shuttered, and with a probable depth of fifteen or twenty feet beneath them. At the further end of the room was a door which

might open into another room, or a second flight of stairs. Could he go and see? That were useless and dangerous. He might have three enemies to clear if the door were locked, and the two gentlemen chose to come from under the bed and join their friend Filoubon.

He had not been in the room three minutes, but perspiration was accumulating on his face, and he seemed to have endured an hour's suspense. In desperation he caught up the candle, made a plunge at the valance, tore it up, and found—a hatbox. He went on his knees and looked under the bed; he rose with a laugh; there was nothing there. Emboldened, he shook the curtains on both sides, punched the bed all over, ran to the door at the further end of the room, found it locked, returned to the other door; went to the head of the stairs, looked all around, and returned, wondering at his folly and thanking God—not, I regret to say, for his deliverance, but that no one had seen his fear. He slammed the door, that Filoubon might hear how little he regarded his caution, and prepared to fasten it. The

key was gone. “Never mind, Monsieur Filoubon,” he said half aloud ; “you sha’n’t beat me with all your cleverness. Nature has not given me wits for nothing.” And taking his knife from his pocket, he cut a wedge from the end of his stick. He hammered it under the door ; and taking the handle in both hands, pulled hard to assure himself of its security. It was quite firm, but three cold fingers slipped down his collar behind, a knife was before his eyes, and a voice whispered in his ears, “Be silent for your life !”

Poor Pepin’s limbs were as limp as wash-leather, and his tongue clave to his palate like clay. The grasp upon his collar relaxed, the blade was withdrawn, and Pepin, turning to see whether to M. Rouge or M. Noir he was indebted for these attentions, discovered neither.

Filoubon, with every muscle in his face commanding silence, inclined his head, and whispered : “I tell you they are in this room, you little fool ; will you trust me now ? When your courage returns, let me know by a nod or otherwise.”

Pepin presently nodded, and Filoubon whispered, “Fumble about with your cursed wedge, draw it out, and meanwhile say, half aloud, ‘Ha, ha ! Monsieur Filoubon, you idiotic old thief, I’ve fastened you out for the night now, and your two blackguard accomplices as well.’”

Pepin winced, but nevertheless did as he was instructed. Meanwhile Filoubon was gliding round the room, stopping now and again for not longer than a second. When he returned to Pepin, he whispered : “They are on the top of the bed, or up the chimney, or in the closet at the end there.”

“What shall I do ?”

“Take off your things, put out your light, and go to bed.” Pepin’s face lengthened. Filoubon whispered : “You can take this knife with you ; but they won’t be such fools as to attack you before the soldiers are asleep, and I shall be with you before then. Now whistle again !”

Pepin whistled, and began pulling off his breeches ; whilst Filoubon, skipping to the

door, disappeared, and closed the door behind him. Pepin rolled up his breeches, and put them into bed. He was not easy now; far from it. Might not this be part of a *ruse* against him? The door was again unfastened. But he had a long knife, certainly. Still he did not feel inclined to cut another wedge with it; for, in addition to his doubts of Filoubon, he now entertained very wholesome doubts as to his own perspicacity. He could hear Filoubon laughing below. He pulled down the bed-clothes, got into bed with his knife, cuddled his breeches, and prepared to blow out the light. His eyes wandered once more round the room, and then at the top above his head. It certainly did bulge in the most suspicious manner; and Pepin, as he blew out his light, heard his teeth rattle, and could see a halo round the light, by reason of the moisture gathered in his eyes. He lay on his back in the dark, rigid as the dead and almost as quiet. His very breath on the thick, damp, cold sheets sounded like men turning in a closet, men sliding down chimneys, men

splitting the top of the bed. Turning his head, the corner of the pillow touched his cheek; and as nearly as possible he disembowelled himself in bringing his knife up to cut the pillow's throat. Oh! the hours and hours he lay there, shaking the massive bed with his deadly cold shivering. He felt sure his hair was become grey. At length there was a scuffling of stools and settles in the room below, and he heard voices in the passage beneath. Ah! the soldiers were going; and now Rouge and Noir would be at liberty to attack him, and Filoubon had not kept his promise to return. As the soldiers ascended the stairs, he determined that he would get up and tell everything, and beg their protection. He had just come to this determination, when he heard Filoubon singing at the top of his voice, in a voice mellowed by much liquor. Here was more food for speculation. Anyway Pepin would speak to the soldiers, and with that view he rose in his bed. But at that moment the door was burst open, and Filoubon, with a candle in his hand, reeled in,

saying to the soldiers behind him: “Here’s my room, bold companions. Come in, and pack yourselves, as many as may, in my bed.”

He set the light on the table, and, pretending to see Pepin for the first time, said, “Holloa, my young friend, what do you do in my bed ?” and added in a whisper, “ Kick up a devil of a row.”

“ This is my bed,” replied Pepin.

“ Then get out of it, and make place for a gentleman,” said a gay military, supporting himself on the neck of Filoubon.

Then Pepin attempted to kick up the row as advised, and so far succeeded, that the soldiers, all of whom were muddled with drink, at length proceeded to drag him from his bed. Here Filoubon interposed, and declared he had mistaken his room, and that he would see no gentleman dragged from his bed by a set of rascally cut-throats.

The soldiers resenting this epithet, and finding Pepin armed with a knife, laid hands on the two, and forcibly ejected them from the room. shutting the door upon them. From

outside the door Filoubon roared vengeance, until the innkeeper came and induced the inebriate mountebank and the injured Pepin to take to the bed in the adjoining apartment.

When they were alone Filoubon took off his boots, and said : “Now, my Pepin, for the second act of this comedy. Hark ! they are putting the table against the door. My word, Messieurs Rouge and Noir will find it difficult to get out of the room without waking some one. But we will make it more difficult still.”

He took a key from his pocket, hid the light in the corner, and having listened attentively, opened the door and crept out. When he returned, he said : “I have locked the door. Now you can go to bed ; or if you would sit up, wrap yourself in a blanket and be still ; for I must not lose a sound. The play is not yet over.”

Pepin wrapped himself in a blanket, and the two sat down in the doorway, listening. They became so accustomed to the snoring, after a time, that they could detect the slightest of other sounds, as if that noise were absent.

Twelve, one, two struck, and Pepin, finding his head nodding, opened his eyes, and found Filoubon was gone from his side. He crept to the door of the next room, and found Filoubon crouching there with his ear against the key-hole. He whispered :

“ There’s *some one* moving in that room, Ha ! it’s they ! They’re moving the table. There’s a noise ; clumsy rascals ! There’s a voice ! Now they’ll make a rush for it.” And indeed at that moment the handle was violently twisted and tugged at ; and, the outer knob having been removed by Filoubon, the spindle slipped through. Then followed a shout : “ Comrades, the blackguards with the knife are upon us !” cried one within, and after that such a scuffling, stamping, struggling, cursing, shrieking, and swearing ensued, as in all probability that respectable hosterie never before heard.

“ It’s all right,” said Filoubon, and drew Pepin into his room, where they waited, listening to the noise in the next apartment, until the innkeeper, with his blunderbuss, and

followed by his entire household, bearing lights, descended to the scene of action, when they emerged, and Filoubon, in a trembling voice, begged to know what the dreadful noise implied.

M.M. Rouge and Noir received such severe punishment from the valiant soldiers that it was deemed unnecessary to send them for further justice at the hands of the officier de paix, and they were let off there and then. The next morning Filoubon and Pepin, in the diligence, passed them as they limped along the road.

“Observe,” said Filoubon, “the folly of employing bunglers. Also remark the difference between the real article and the charlatan.”

“Thanks to you, Filoubon, that rascal Trombone has not succeeded.”

“Succeeded! No. But, Monsieur, Trombone has yet to suffer. When Filoubon leaves an expensive troupe idle a whole fortnight, to go upon a campaign, it is not sufficient that he baulks his foe; he must rout him. You shall see, my Pepin, how we will serve this rascal.”

“ Oh ! Filoubon, how can I repay you ? ”

“ Monsieur Pepin, virtue is its own reward.”

* * *

When the story of the attack upon Pepin and its failure circulated in Gomarche, and it was rumoured that Pepin might be expected in a few days, Trombone was at his wits' end for an expedient to avoid the impending catastrophe. Nothing but a miracle could save him from exposure and infamy. Happily a thaumaturgist was at hand in the person of Filoubon, and to him he applied in his strait. For Filoubon had returned,—indeed it was he who circulated the rumour. The difficulty he might have experienced in exposing his villany to Filoubon, Filoubon himself removed.

“ Monsieur,” he said, before Turenne's Trombone had faltered out half-a-dozen words—“monsieur, you have sold your daughter and yourself. You trusted your little affair to two impostors ; they professed to be rogues, whereas they were simply fools. Trust now to me—I am no impostor. Maintenant, suppose I arrange matters so pleasantly that you

shall get two thousand livres from M. le Marquis and another thousand from M. Pepin, at the same time satisfying both parties—what would you do for your benefactor ? ”

“ Give you half the plunder.”

“ Fifteen hundred livres—agreed. Now, Trombone, to business. I will be bound some of the villagers, Madame Lechat and others, have asked what has become of the little Marie ? ”

“ They have truly.”

“ And you said—what did you say ? ”

“ I said she was ill, and visiting my sister at Les Audelles.”

“ Good. Go now this instant, tell Madame Lechat that your child is convalescent and will return, and come with me directly after.”

“ For what ? ”

“ To fetch your daughter.”

“ But the marquis has her locked up in his inaccessible château ! ”

“ That is the two thousand livres’ daughter. The one you will fetch is the one thousand livres’ child.”

“ I am bewildered ! ”

“Look you, my poor Trombone. I have children in every village—more than I know what to do with. You shall come with me and select one that will suit our Pepin, and you shall adopt her, eh ?”

“But the girl ?”

“We will make her understand. My faith ! nice little husbands are not so plentiful that the girls should be scrupulous as to how they get them.”

It has been said and shown that this Filoubon had no principle, and his present nefarious scheme was quite consistent with his practice, cheating every one fairly alike. If he plundered a man, would it not be equity to restore ? By the same rule, if he saved Pepin from the hands of thieves one day, would he not be justified in robbing him the next ? Thus *he* reasoned.

So this pretty pair of rascals went, taking with them some dresses and trinkets that belonged to poor little Marie, and found a girl in Filoubon’s troupe who, but that she had lost her speech, was passably like Filoubon’s little

daughter ; and having told her the scheme, to which the minx listened contentedly and consented to be party to readily enough, they gave her the clothes and bade her dress in them.

The day following Pepin arrived in Gomarche, and M. Trombone returned with his daughter. Next to Pepin the person most eager to see “the little Marie” was Madame Lechat. No sooner had she cast eyes on the girl than she was off round the village like a cricket, poking her long nose in at every door, and saying :

“ I told you so ! That barefaced old impostor, that villain Trombone, has brought home a girl to palm on poor Pepin that’s no more like the little Marie than I am. She’s artfully made-up enough ; but one can see the rouge on her cheeks and the dye in her hair with half an eye.”

Pepin appeared greatly shocked by the altered appearance of his sweetheart. She was thin, and her beautiful hair was short. The doctor had cut it, Trombone said, because

of her fever. But the most distressing result of her illness was that her musical voice and her power of speech had entirely left her. For some time Pepin refused to believe that this was his little Marie, although M. Trombone swore by the honour of a soldier that it was, and vowed he would first thrash Pepin and then imprison him if he dared doubt the veracity of Turenne's Trombone. These threats and protestations Pepin quietly disregarded, declaring that the girl was not Marie, and that he would have nothing to do with her ; but when the girl burst into tears, and held out her arms to him, his incredulity vanished, and he nursed her against his breast, soothing her with kind remorseful words until she smiled again.

Trombone insisted upon the marriage taking place at once ; so the young people went before the notary and were made man and wife. Pepin begged his and his wife's friends to accompany him to a house he had engaged in the neighbourhood, and spend the remainder of the day in appropriate festivities. The invita-

tion did not extend to M. Trombone. He, however, had a house of his own and festivities too, and the friends who were to participate therein were M. Filoubon and the Marquis de la Grenouillegonflée. Ah, how the three wicked vagabonds chuckled and roared as the bridegroom crossed the Place with the precious bride they had foisted on him ! All were particularly pleased. There was now no bar to the marquis's nuptials with the little Marie ; so having paid his two thousand livres, as agreed, he took his departure, bidding Trombone come to the château on the morrow, when the notary would attend to finish the business. When he was gone, Filoubon took his share of the money that had been made by these transactions, and then left Trombone, who immediately went over to the 'Soleil d'Or' to begin spending his.

He was not more than three parts inebriated when two lacqueys from the Château de la Grenouillegonflée entered the inn and attached themselves to the happy veteran. The marquis desired Trombone's attendance at the châ-

teau instantly. Trombone pleaded in vain to be left in the ‘Soleil d’Or’; the lacqueys had their orders, and seeing the state in which their guest was in, without more ado they took him between them, from the cool retreat and the urgent business he was engaged in, out into the broiling heat of the afternoon. The château was well supplied with pumps, and beneath one of these the lacqueys placed Trombone, pumping on him with such energy as they possessed. After spending a delicious quarter of an hour here, Trombone rose cool-headed and sober, and was ushered immediately into the presence of the marquis. M. le Marquis was stamping up and down the magnificent apartment, ringing the bells, and smashing the china—it was the custom of the infuriated in the last century. When he had broken all the bell-wires, and there was nothing left to smash, he fell into a chair and cried. After this exhibition he called Trombone to his side, and explained the cause of his passion. The little Marie was gone! How long she had been gone he did not know;

for the duenna under whose charge she had been placed could not tell. In the first paroxysm of his rage the marquis had thrown a decanter at her head, and by a pure accident hit it. This mistake he now regretted. However, he had seen Marie within a week. It was probable she had escaped that very morning, and at present was concealed in the woods adjacent to the château. One thing was imperatively necessary—the girl must be found at once. If she got into Gomarche, the delinquency of the marquis and the veteran would be discovered, and they might reasonably expect to row both in one boat, and that boat a galley. The marquis thought of a wife and liberty to smash china : Trombone thought of his unexpended livres and the ‘Soleil d’Or’. Then both rushed out into the wood as fast as a wooden leg and a gouty toe would permit them. For hours they searched the paths and alleys of the wood, tearing their clothes and hands with brier and bramble, perspiring at every pore, and aching in every joint. At length they

found a fearful trace of the fugitive. By the border of the wood, near the road, was a deep shaft, which had been sunk for a well, and by its side a mound of earth, thrown up by the excavators. After digging a considerable depth they had failed to find water, and the work had been abandoned. A huge piece of timber, projecting over the mouth of the pit, had been left, and was the only intimation of danger; indeed this was partly concealed by the long grass and growth which had sprung up about it. While these two miserable old men were resting their tired bodies upon this mound, they detected something fluttering upon the end of the timber. Trombone rose and made a nearer inspection. It was a long fragment of a dark dress material, and depended some way down the shaft. He stretched himself along the timber, and disengaging the piece, brought it still nearer to his eyes. He rose to his feet, and with a blanched face turned to the marquis. In a husky whisper he said :

“ It is the little Marie’s ! ”

Poor little Marie ! She bore her imprisonment patiently enough for some time. Looking across the woods she could see from the window the road winding down the hill on the other side of the valley ; on this road her eyes were ever fixed. At that distance people looked no larger than flies : yet she felt sure that when Pepin came in sight she should know him. She had little doubt that Pepin would find her. She laughed at the folly of her father and the marquis, who thought by so dull a contrivance to keep them asunder. Was it possible that locks and bolts would be of any service against one who could make a clock worth a thousand livres ! M. le Marquis had paid her a visit. He said :

“ My pretty, pretty, pretty, this day week you will be no longer my sweetheart ! ”

“ Monseigneur, you are very good to me this morning.”

“ This day week, my rosebud, you shall be my wife.”

“ I am afraid that honour is not for me. The law will not allow me to possess more than

my little Pepin; it is hard—for me—is it not?"

"Oh, oh, oh ! my pretty, pretty, pretty ! I have provided that you shall not offend the law in that respect. I have provided for Monsieur Pepin."

"What do you mean ?" said Marie, turning white, and crouching down like a panther, with her fingers prepared to gripe well the projections upon the old gentleman's countenance.

There was nothing ironical about her now. She did not pretend one thing and mean another. With a rapidity scarcely to be expected in one so advanced in years and decay, the marquis skipped out of the room, and secured the door between himself and the lady he proposed making his wife. When he could muster breath, he put his vile old mouth to the key-hole, and shouted through :

"I've sent two brigands to rob your Pepin—to kill him—to slaughter him—to jump on him. You little, little, little—"

Before he could find a word with which to

express himself, Marie threw herself at the door with such force that the panels cracked, and M. le Marquis sped down the stairs to a safer refuge.

And now, Marie, where art thou? Hast thou escaped but to end thy bright short life so suddenly, so awfully? Ah, well! better than to live and bear the weight of sorrow and disappointment that thy lover's marriage with another would have laid on thy young heart.

* * *

To return.

The two old men threw stones down the well, and listened.

“There is no sound. She is dead.”

“My faith! I will have back my two thousand livres.”

“And I—I will have back my daughter, monseigneur.”

“What then!”

“The galleys.”

“Trombone, no one must know this.”

“And the livres?”

“Keep them. Sac-r-r-r-r-r-r-ré!”

“What’s to be done?”

“Return. Ah! my poor back!”

“But the body may be found!”

“No one is likely to go down there, and one can’t see what is down there.”

“Monseigneur, sight is not the only sense, alas!”

Trombone pinched his nose expressively.

“That is a truth.”

“You must fetch big stones, monseigneur, and I will drop them down.”

“This heap of stones—”

“Touch them not. It would lead to our discovery.”

They had to go far for stones, these two miserable old men, and the moon was high in the heavens when they desisted.

“O my back! That will do.”

“O my leg! Yes, that will do.”

“Yes, that will do,” said a third voice.

The two screamed with fright, and looked at the bush from which the voice proceeded. What voice was it? Was it from the dead? It was supernatural, frightful. The leaves of

the bush quivered, and from it rose a head.
Was it an apparition ?

No, it was Filoubon. He said : " You two, consider yourselves my prisoners. I am a rascal, but I will not wink at this infamy. Parricide,* consider yourself strangled ! And you, marquis, as this girl is not your wife, rest assured you will not go unpunished."

" She was dead."

" How will you prove that ? "

" Filoubon, dear Filoubon, I have ever been your good friend."

" Ah ! how will you repay me for that injury ? "

" With livres."

" Eh ? "

" And I, too, will buy your friendship with livres."

" How many will you give your friend never to pollute his mouth again with your name, Monsieur Trombone ? "

" Fifty."

* Filoubon knew no more than I, the proper title to which Trombone was entitled.

“ What ? Parricide ! ”

“ For heaven’s sake speak lower, or not at all ! Take all my fifteen hundred.”

“ Monsieur, I forget whom you were two seconds since ; shake hands. And now, monseigneur ? ”

“ A hundred livres.”

“ What ? ”

“ I’m only a murderer.”

“ Yes, but this was a girl, young, prepossessing ; that makes a difference, I can tell you. And you are horrid ugly ; that also will make a difference with the tribunal.”

“ What you will.”

“ Monseigneur, I shall remember where you live until I have the money. Let us get it at once.”

Then they returned to the château ; and when Filoubon had filled his pockets with gold, he said to Trombone :

“ Monsieur, do you not feel remorse ? Do you not wish the little Marie were living ? ”

“ Ah, me, that I do, God knows ! ”

“ And you, marquis ? ”

“I coincide.”

“Now, what would you give me, you two, if I could bring her to life.”

“The world, monsieur—if I only had it,” said Trombone, feeling the corners of his empty pockets.

“You have been very good to me,” said Filoubon, “I will be good to you—gratuitously. I will give you a joyful surprise. Prepare yourselves. The little Marie lives !”

“Heavens !” shrieked the marquis.

“The other place !” growled Trombone.

“But the piece of her dress ?”

“I hung it over the well, as a caution to the unwary.”

“Do you know where she is ?”

“Yes, she is in the hands of a friend of mine.”

“Monsieur, we are as badly off as ever.”

“She will make it unpleasant for you with the prefect, if she can get M. Pepin to help her.”

“M-o-n Dieu !”

“The devil !”

“ Will your friend give her up ? ”

“ He will want a lot of money.”

“ Sac-r-r-r-é ! He must have it.”

“ Monseigneur, what will be my commission ? ”

“ What you will.”

“ That little heap of notes ; they are useless to you ; they will make me quite respectable.”

“ You shall have them when you show us the girl.”

“ Follow me, then, monseigneur ; you also may follow, Monsieur Trombone, for the sake of our old acquaintance.”

Filoubon led them for many weary miles, until at last they came to a wretched hovel, embowered in rank shrubs. Filoubon opened the door, and bade them step inside until he returned with the little Marie. When he had closed the door upon them, the marquis said :

“ This is a small house.”

“ Truly ; I cannot stand upright.”

“ They have been cooking some strange potage here.”

“ My faith, there is a strange odour ! What

is this? Oh-h, the name of heaven! it is a pigsty! Hush! there are voices."

Indeed there were voices, and lights approaching. There was also the sound of muffled laughter; and presently, the door being thrown open, the two, crouching upon the straw, beheld a group of people, in holiday dress, gathered before them. Foremost stood Pepin, and by his side the bride they had foisted upon him. Trombone and the marquis were at a loss to understand this scene, until Filoubon, stepping between, said :

"Monsieur le Marquis de la Grenouille-gonflée, permit me to introduce you to the little Marie, Monsieur Pepin's bride."

"But—but—but she is the dumb girl?"

"Yes, and the little Marie also," she said, and she threw her arms round her husband's neck and kissed him before every one.

Then the two old rogues crawled out of the pigsty and walked home, that is if they died not on the road.

Æriet.



ERIC.

I.

ERIC was king of Kent. His mother, Guineva, was a very clever woman—that is to say, she could do a great many things that other ladies could not do, and was therefore deeply respected and quietly disliked generally. A dozen centuries does not make much difference in human nature. Guineva managed everybody in her son's realm, and that gave the young king plenty of time for hawking and skylarking. Therein *he* did what many others could not do; but for all that, he was not clever like his mother. Very

little of her talent had he inherited. The qualities of a good ruler had yet to be developed ; as yet he was but a good fellow. Physically he was a king ; and none ever was handsomer, bolder, kinder, nobler than he ; morally he was a dunce ; he knew as little of international law as you do. He was but eighteen. He had no anxiety about the future. Whilst his mother lived she could govern his little kingdom, and when she was gone his wife could take her place. For you may be sure so clever a manager as Guineva had elected a wife for her son. The name of his bride-elect was Cuneguild, and she was the daughter of Beod, the queen's brother. Guineva could not but be conscious of the cleverness of her family, and was anxious to keep the crown for such good heads. Though Cuneguild was no more than five-and-twenty, she exhibited already the wisdom and strength of mind of fifty. She had suggested several imposts, which Guineva had enforced with great benefit to the regal coffers, thereby showing herself admirably qualified for the

duties of a queen. She did not love King Eric, but that was of little importance, as he did not love her. Indeed he was rather pleased this was so ; kissing her would have been so troublesome under other circumstances.

One day the hounds lost scent of their game, and when King Eric came up with them, he saw at some distance a cottage by which stood a girl who was pointing in the direction taken by the stag. Waving his cap in acknowledgment of the service, the king spurred forward his horse ; then he winded his horn, and hunters and dogs trooped after him, and away out of sight of the girl by the cottage. It was a famous hunt ; and, when the stag was killed, the king's henchmen made a fire and roasted it, whilst the hunters talked of the vicissitudes of the chase. Certainly their success was due to the maid in the wood, so they drank her health in the bright water of the brook they rested beside. The stag was cooked, and they feasted on it in the manner of that time, each man striving to

outdo his neighbour in the quantity he ate. For then it was considered a proof of good breeding to eat decidedly more than was pleasant, precisely as now it is considered genteel to eat less than is comfortable. After the feast, each man stretched himself on the grass and slept—Eric excepted. There was no necessity for him to prove his gentility, and consequently he laid down his whittle before he was surfeited, whilst others were not surfeited until there were no ‘wittles’ left, as the jester not wittily observed. Sitting by the brook-side, the young king watched the dragon-flies skimming over the water-plants, touching a hundred, resting upon none, as if unable to find the food they sought; and in like manner his thoughts flitted over a multitude of subjects, and lingered on not one until the wood-maid recurred to his recollection. Then he felt that she was what his heart had been seeking for, and he devoted his thought to her. Yet that she was tall and lithe, comely and fair, and that her hair shone in the sunlight, was all he knew. Perhaps

the mind was not very capacious that so little should fill it: this legend telleth not. It pleased him to think of the girl as he sat on the mossy bank, idly throwing broken twigs upon the rippling water. Ah! where will the stream bear these immaterial twigs? whither tend these unconsidered thoughts? To become still less important—to be lost in the immensity of ocean, or to be the minute foundation of a dam that shall eventually turn the whole stream from its original course, through what fruitful and desert places, who shall tell?

The sun was getting low; the music of rippling waters and humming insects was broken by the sonorous snoring of the hunters. Close at hand Eric's steed, fastened to a tree, quietly browsed. The king rose, and without disturbing the slumberers, loosed his horse, leaped on his back, and sped away at a gallop. It took him so long to find the cottage, that he was quite justified in asking to rest his horse awhile when he found it. The girl was standing by the wicket as he rode up, and

when she saw him, her face flushed as scarlet as his. She could not have been more confused if she had been thinking of him all day. There was a bright flower in her hair. What on earth was the use of a flower in a position where she could neither see it nor smell it, and where but by the remotest of chances—as the present—it would not be seen by any one else, never entered Eric's head ; that receptacle was filled with one all-sufficient idea—the girl was prodigiously pretty. Swanred, her father, after much genuflection, took the king's horse into a shed, and Ethel, the maid, led Eric into the cottage. They had nothing to offer him but a bowl of new milk and red sweet-smelling apples ; but he was quite contented, and was so lively and kind in chatting with Swanred, that it was quite pleasant to listen to him. Ethel stood behind her father's chair, and Eric felt that her eyes were upon him the whole time ; and when he looked up their eyes met, and said more than their tongues would have dared to whisper to themselves. Swanred was quite sorry when the

king rose to depart; but so long as he was near, Ethel could feel nothing but pleasure. She held his stirrup and his light spear whilst her father held the rein. When Eric was in his saddle, he put out his hand for his spear. Ethel must have been thinking of something very different, I imagine, for instead of the murderous weapon, she laid her gentle little white hand in Eric's, and looked straight up into his good blue eyes. Then the king bent his lips to the small fingers, and, having pressed them, spurred away, content to sell his spear for so pretty a price. When the mistake was discovered, tears started to Ethel's eyes; Swanred regarded this as a sign of regret for her carelessness, and refrained from upbraiding her. But Ethel thought nothing of her carelessness. How the king would interpret her mistake was what troubled her. What would he think, or not think, of her boldness? She burned with shame, and was relentless in self-punishment. Yet what did it matter? Her father did not notice the fault for which *she* blamed herself. What if

the king did think her bold and forward—the fear of which kept her tossing about on her bed when she should have been quietly sleeping—he very probably would never come again to accuse her of it. Very likely he looked upon it as a simple error, and attached no importance to it. Perhaps he had forgotten all about her. Then what did all this fretting and torturing signify? Well, it signified this, that the prettiest girl had set eyes on the handsomest man in the kingdom, and loved him.

Eric had a thousand spears at home, and one was quite as good as another; but somehow, by the next morning, he had conceived and matured a wondrous affection for the lost one. After breakfast he determined to return to the wood for it. Meanwhile Swanred, who had risen with the lark, was trudging through the woods in his best jerkin with the spear on his shoulder.

“Of course it must go back,” thought Ethel in the night; but nevertheless, when her father took it from her hands, she sighed.

When Swanred threw it over his shoulder as if it were a common ash-stick, it seemed almost a profanation to Ethel, who had held it in such reverence. She had clasped her hands where his had been, and—of what other foolishness she was guilty I will not tell. It was gone, and there was no fear now of the young king coming. That was a consolation to the shame-stricken—at any rate she tried to think so. Half-way through the wood, Eric met Swanred with the cherished spear; but he was not very grateful, and turned his horse round with an unusual wrench at his mouth, and walked home neither whistling nor singing as at starting.

Ethel, after a little hesitation, put an infinity of questions to her father. Was the king angry? what did he say? had he mentioned—the apples? did he say how he got home? did he look annoyed? what did he say about last night?

Ah, well! now certainly it was all over. So thought two young people in the kingdom of Kent, and two young people sighed. Ethel

had a deal of spinning on hand, and as she sat at her wheel she dreamed long golden dreams. She dreamed of making a gay cloth for the king's horse, and bearing it herself to his palace, and seeing him once again, and receiving a kind word or two for her trouble; she dreamed of saving the king from imminent peril; she dreamed many another plot, but all had this consummation—the king would be grateful to her. But somehow, despite the happy dreams, the evening was dreadfully blank, and she felt that she should like to have a good cry. She and her father over their meals had talked of nothing but King Eric's visit; but when at last Swanred, for the sake of variety, made a meteorological observation, Ethel was vexed, and not content until she had turned the talk into the old channel. She fell asleep, hoping to continue her day-dreams.

There was a spring in the wood, and its waters were quite famous for their purity and freshness. Thither Ethel took her earthen pitcher in the morning. The grass was wet

with heavy dew, and the gossamers stretched in the brambles, glistening with beads of crystal moisture, looked like gemmed necklets left there by night elves. The tree-tops were tinged with the brightness of the sun, now slowly creeping over the hills ; but the misty veil was not yet stripped from the green alleys in the wood. The air was sweet with thyme ; blackbirds and thrushes sang in the bushes. But a sound more fascinating to her ear than these woodland warblers made Ethel rise from her seat beside the spring with a cry of joy ; and a sight more beautiful than the rising sun flushed her face and brightened her eyes. She heard the jingling of a horse's caparison, and saw above the grey vapour the bright habit and flowing plume of King Eric as he rode swiftly towards her. His handsome face was as bright as hers, and happiness smiled in his eyes. He reined his horse, and sprang from it to the side of Ethel. She knew too little of love to conceal it, and her face told the gladness of her heart. She was but fifteen, and quite untutored. Eric held out his hand, and she

put her—pitcher into it. He laughed and blushed, and she, bending her head, blushed too. She had made another mistake. And then, as if it were quite a matter of course, they walked along—Eric leading his horse with one hand, and carrying the pitcher in the other, and Ethel by his side twining her slender hands before her. The king spoke about half-a-dozen sentences in the course of the walk, not one of which is sufficiently remarkable to chronicle. But how sweet that walk was! and for young and active people how slowly they journeyed! The noble horse seemed quite to understand the position of affairs, and accommodated his pace to theirs, as if in sympathy with their inclinations. When the cottage was in sight they stopped, and regret was in their young faces. They lingered for a moment; but, as Eric had nothing to say, it was necessary to separate. How was Ethel to say “Good-bye?” She felt embarrassed. At any rate there would be no harm in kissing the dear large-eyed horse. She put her hand upon his neck and

kissed his smooth sleek head. That was the prettiest, most tantalising picture the king had ever beheld. He gave the pitcher into her left hand, and still held out his right: this time she laid her hand in it. But he did not kiss it. He looked in her eyes, and said, “Farewell,” very sweetly; she returned the adieu with a faltering voice. Then he sprang on his horse, and she walked on quietly. When she heard his accoutrements rattling, she looked round; he was speeding away like the wind. He, too, turned his head; he waved his cap, and then an angle of the wood hid him from her sight. But, not two moments later, she heard the rattling again, and once more the prince was by her side.

“Dost thou go to the spring every morning?” he asked.

She nodded.



Who could help loving King Eric? and who that ever loved first thought of the wisdom or unwisdom of loving? Ethel loved and Eric loved, and reason did not interfere

with the happiness of these young creatures. Every day for a whole year they met in the woods. Guineva, of course, knew all about it, although Eric had not mentioned the matter at home. She was far too clever to let any movement of her son's escape her notice. On the second occasion of his late arrival at the breakfast-table, her suspicions were aroused, and her faithful knave Vulpis tracked the king the following morning, and brought her as full and picturesque an account of her son's proceeding as if he were paid for it at the rate of a penny a line. Guineva did not interfere or attempt to obstruct the course of true love—that, crystalline as it was in its early passage, must end in a mess, she knew. Kings had loved beggar-maids before her time. She knew her son was weak, and that weak people occasionally love. If he couldn't love Cune-guild, he must love some one else. She had no apprehension of future difficulties and anticipated consequences. At the worst, a pension would have to be paid to the girl when the inevitable result came. It was a deplorable

waste of money ; but this species of wild-oats was the cheapest the king could sow. The consequent reaction would precipitate his marriage with Cuneguild. He might like a wife after a sweetheart, for the sake of change and variety. Thus Guineva settled everything, and being very pleased with herself, was extremely amiable to her son. And very likely her anticipations would have been realised, if Ethel and Eric had loved with that love which alone the queen comprehended. She took her own emotions as a standard by which to judge those of others ; and she was the most indulgent and complacent of mothers for twelve months before she discovered her error.

One morning when she came into the hall she found Eric, contrary to his custom, so early seated on the daïs.

“ Am I late, or hast thou returned early from the woods ? ” asked Guineva, as she took her seat beside him.

“ Thou art early, my mother. I have not ridden in the woods this morning. I desire to speak with thee when we are alone.”

“Hath it come to this at last, my son?” said the queen, with a roguish smile at her son. She ate her meal with a good appetite, and conversed with gaiety and sprightliness the while. She could but be merry, for her predictions were, as usual, right; there was no surer means of setting herself on good terms with herself. When they were alone, the king said:

“Mother, I am going to wed.”

“I am very glad to hear it,” said the queen, smiling at his coming to the point with reference to Cuneguild so speedily.

“Thou knowest, doubtless, that I have loved for some time Ethel, the daughter of Swanred.”

“Quite well.”

“He is dead, and she can no longer live in the woods.”

“Yes, Eric.”

“She must come here.”

“It will be rather awkward at first; but I dare say we can make room for her,” said the queen, settling in her mind that Ethel should

be put in the kitchen as cook-wench *vice* Beda, relegated to the scullery.

“I am glad thou accordest with my wish.”

“It is so reasonable and so just.”

“I thank thee, my mother, and acknowledge with contrition that I wronged thee by believing thou wouldest think otherwise. I shall ride to my cousin Cuneguild and tell her this.”

“I think there is no necessity for telling her anything about it; she might be jealous.”

“I trust she will forgive me,” said Eric, thinking that Cuneguild would be not unreasonably angry at this alteration of her future.

“There is nothing for her forgiveness,” said the queen.

“I never loved her.”

“Of course not—a common flirtation,” said Guineva, her mind and words referring to Ethel.

“We should never have been happy had we married,” pursued the king.

“ Marriage with her is quite out of the question ; besides, union with one you don’t love is absolutely wicked.”

“ So I shall go and tell her ? ”

“ Do, my dear son. Say she can be my cook-wench when she gets over her trouble, and you may add, that I’m quite sorry for her.”

[They were getting dreadfully fogged with the personal pronoun. Both were her-ing, as the cockney jester in later days remarked.]

“ Dost thou not think that would be unkind ? ” suggested Eric.

“ I know little about that,” answered Guineva, and this was true ; nobody could know less about kindness than she.

“ Before I go, give me thy blessing, mother mine.”

Eric kneels.

“ Bless thee, my son ! ”

“ And my wife Ethel.”

The queen was about to reply, “ Ethel be blessed ; ” but reflecting that this was slang, and not exactly what she intended, she said

in a tone of amazement: “What do you mean?”

Eric explained: Guineva comprehended. Then she explained, and he comprehended.

“Ethel shall never be thy wife.”

“Never be my wife?”

“Never?”

Eric clapped his hands; a vassal appeared. Drawing himself to his full height, Eric asked:

“Who am I?”

“The king,” answered the vassal.

Eric looked significantly at his astonished mother, and strode down the hall and into the thronged courtyard, his eyes glittering, his lips compressed, and his white nostrils expanded. He was no longer a boy. The courtiers watched him as he galloped towards the castle of Beod, where lived Cuneguild; and presently they observed as the queen passed that there were the signs of tribulation in her face. Then they smiled. Happily for them the queen was too preoccupied to notice their glee. There were fresh and unexpected

demands upon her strategic abilities. She was equal to the emergency. She ordered her palfrey and rode into the woods, and was back at her embroidery before Eric returned to the palace. Determined that if Cuneguild could not be queen Ethel should not, she had employed her visit to the woods in counteracting Eric's visit to Beod's castle.

From Cuneguild, Eric rode to the lonesome little maid in the wood. Ethel was in tears; but she begged Eric would not question her about them. Guineva had fed the tender little soul with the knowledge of evil, filling her with shame and sorrow. Eric remained silent for a time; but as side by side they trod the sweet old path beneath the trees, he said:

“Hath my mother visited thee, Ethel?”

“Yes, Eric.”

“What said she?”

“Oh, I cannot tell!” She hid her burning face in her hands, and continued: “She asked me dreadful questions, and told me dreadful things.”

“Of me?”

“Yes, Eric.”

A silence; then Eric:

“Dost thou love me still, little one?”

“Oh! yes, yes, yes; they are but lies that she spake.”

Another interval of silence succeeded; then:

“Thou must live no longer alone in the woods, Ethel,” said Eric.

“Where shall I go, my king?”

“To my palace with me; and thou must be my wife and my queen.”

“Thy wife!”

“My wife, dearest. My servants to-morrow shall bring thee robes of velvet and silk, and chains of gold, and thou shalt put away thy russet gown and simple ribbons.”

“As thou wilt, my king.”

“Why do you speak so sadly?”

“I have been so happy in this russet gown. I pray thee give me some time to prepare myself; I shall be strange, awkward, and unhappy before thy great friends.”

“There is none greater than I am.”

“There is none loves me as thou dost ; and none I shall love as I do thee.”

“I will give thee a week, and no more,” said the young king. Then he clasped her in his arms, and kissed her as of old ; and, trusting him infinitely, she felt no shame.

When Eric bade his people prepare a great feast, and get ready bridal clothes for their new queen, Guineva knew her first move had failed ; but she smiled blandly whilst she prepared herself for a second. As she took her afternoon walk in the garden, her majesty saw an old cat, who had been on the watch, blinking and purring, for a whole morning, stealthily remove a rib-bone from under the very nose of the king’s mastiff, who had fallen asleep in the sun. For Guineva there was a moral in that.

One day, when Eric was gone after finery for his bride, Guineva paid a second visit to Ethel.

“Thou must let me kiss thy pretty cheek,” said the old queen ; “for I have taken a wonderful interest in thee. Never have I known

so good and innocent a young girl—that is, a pretty one. It is for thy sake alone I am here now."

"Thou art very good to me," said Ethel.

"I wish to give thee cause to think so. Ethel, my love, has thou ever asked Eric *why* he loves thee?"

"No," answered she in amazement, wondering at the same time why Eric did love her.

"Dost thou think he is going to make thee his queen, because he sees in thee the qualifications for governing his realm?"

Ethel could not answer. The thought of becoming a queen was quite new to her; but the idea of governing anything had never before entered her head. She was bewildered.

The queen continued :

"Thou seest, dear, that although it appears—contrary to my belief the other day—that Eric is a virtuous and honourable man, he is a very bad king. Now, don't be angry until thou hast heard me out: I mean that he is

perfectly unable to keep his country happy and peaceful. *Now I do all that for him.*"

"He hath told me so."

"It is not his fault, poor boy, that he is unable to do so. Nature inclines him to frivolity, as it influences another man to gravity. He is fond of hunting and pretty faces, and so on. By the way, how very pretty *thou* art, dear!" [Ethel received that arrow with a wince.] "As I was saying, I govern; and a very hard matter, I assure thee, it is to keep all the poor subjects comfortable, and the rich ones amiable. But I cannot do this for long; it is killing me. Thou seest I am getting an old woman; and Eric, who is but eighteen, was born to me when I was no older than thou art. I must resign directly Eric brings one to fill my place. I am delighted he has found one capable of doing so. It is seldom such amiability and prettiness as thou possessest are combined with the firmness, wisdom, and education necessary to a queen. Eric, dear child, is neither wise nor clever; but I have no doubt the qualities of thy mind

are sufficiently palpable even for him to see."

She paused; then Ethel:

"I know not whether I am wise or firm, but I know that I am ignorant."

"Thou astonishest me!"

"But what I am, and all that I am, Eric my king knows."

"Then he loves thee only for thy prettiness?"

"He loves me."

"My poor lost darling!" sobbed the queen, embracing Ethel; "a year of the vexations of governing will destroy thy beauty; then how will thy tender loving heart bear neglect and coldness? and my unhappy foolish boy! the punishment of his wicked selfishness, in taking thee from thy happy state, my poor uneducated girl, will be degradation and death."

"Death!"

"Yes. Thinkest thou the designing and ambitious courtiers, whom even now with difficulty I restrain, will let a weak helpless

boy rule them when the throne may be purchased at the price of his head ? Blood, blood, blood ! Ah, I see the palace steps as I saw them when King Gurdie's wife and babe were thrown upon the sword, taken reeking from the heart of the slaughtered king ! ”

“ Oh ! ”

* * * * *

Between tears and frightful dreams poor little Ethel passed a very unpleasant night ; but she smiled again when Eric came to her. He was gay and lively with the thought of the bravery he had bought for his lovely bride ; but as Ethel thought of the queen's words, his gayness and levity seemed to cut her sad heart. Eric walked along, rattling from one subject to another, and getting a laugh from each ; while Ethel, holding his hand and lingering a little behind, began to weep very silently. Eric did not notice this until, in the midst of a peal of laughter, he felt a tear drop upon his hand. He was silent at once ; then he earnestly soothed her. But though he laughed no more, his heart was still light when Ethel, turning

her tearful eyes up to him, asked, with a depth in her words known only to herself:

“What dost thou love me for, Eric?”

Eric was looking into her eyes as she spoke, and their beseeching loveliness seemed to answer her question.

“For your beautiful eyes, my darling,” he said.

“Was the queen indeed right?” thought Ethel. Presently she asked: “If my eyes were gone, and all my beauty marred, if I were as ugly as Griddel the witch, wouldest thou love me?”

It was a difficult problem. Eric tried to imagine Ethel looking like Griddel the witch, and next he tried to fancy himself loving Griddel—the idea was so absurd that he laughed as he answered her, “Yes.” But he did not say what he felt—what was too much for his lips to tell—that were she ever so ugly he should still love her for her sweetness; and that he saw in those deep beautiful eyes truth and clear judgment, and the qualities of soul that would guide his counsels, and make him

a good ruler over his subjects. That was what poor Ethel's heart was yearning to hear, what she hoped he thought and would say, what for ever would have dispelled this new doubt of him and of herself. Instead of that, he had answered her lightly, and, indeed, after a hesitation, as though reluctant to say yes, and saying so only to spare her feelings.

"Let us think of something else," said Eric, seeing her still depressed; and however unwisely, still with the kindest intention, he forced his thoughts back to their previous occupation, and rattled out lively quips and jests. But Ethel could not think of something else, and this very anxiety of the king to do so served only to confirm her worst fears. For the first time she disbelieved her king. He lied when he said he could love her without her beauty. The thought oppressed her, and she could say nothing to Eric, excepting such brief replies as his direct questions commanded. He could not understand her dejection, and only increased it by his efforts to remove it. When they were parting, she looked up into his face

with yearning tenderness. One last hope was in her heart that now he would say, “Ethel, I love you because you are good and true.” She looked very lovely with her pale grave face and her clear lustrous eyes.

“How beautiful thou art!” said Eric. Then he kissed her cold cheek, leapt on his horse, and rode away.

Ethel stood in silent grief beyond tears, watching him until he was lost to sight; then she stretched her arms to the void, and cried aloud :

“My king, my king, farewell!”

Guineva did things thoroughly: especially earnest was she now that her own interests were threatened. She did not sleep after Eric had so firmly asserted his prerogative; nor did she suffer others to have much rest. In particular, she disturbed the slumbers of Cuneguild on the morning following the last interview between Eric and Ethel. Guineva had a scheme that required the instant co-operation of her niece. As it was a matter of having a kingdom and a king to govern, or nobody or

nothing at all—for the young lady was not very attractive—Cuneguild dressed and was on her palfrey ten minutes after the queen had drawn her from her bed. They met Ethel some little distance from her cottage.

“We have come to speak with thee,” said Guineva.

Ethel bowed, and led the royal ladies to her cottage. She provided them with seats, and stood impassive and cold before them. The queen, it has been suggested, was a remarkable woman, and her proceedings now were of a kind worthy such a woman. She addressed herself not to Ethel, but to Cuneguild, putting her through an elaborate catechism, which comprised questions upon mathematics, philosophy, theology, geography, metallurgy, conchology, political economy, chronology, national law, physics, and a variety of subjects too great to enumerate; to all which questions, Cuneguild answered with unhesitating accuracy. When the queen believed that Ethel was sufficiently impressed with the awful pro-

fundity of the erudite Cuneguild, she turned to her, and said :

“ This is the princess whom my son loved until he saw you, loving her with an affection based upon esteem for her magnificent abilities and a regard for the welfare of his people. This is the amiable princess whose tender heart ” [she kicked Cuneguild, who immediately shed a tear] “ is breaking with bitter grief and sorrow. This is the wife of whom thou wouldest deprive my foolish boy—this the queen of whom thou wouldest rob thine own country.”

The queen paused, not for want of words, but of breath, and Ethel spoke :

“ Princess, I shall not rob thee of thy husband ; may you live long to bless him and this country ! The king will never wed me.”

Guineva and Cuneguild looked at each other doubtfully. Was it probable that if, as Ethel’s words suggested to them, the king had cried off, she would not contrive to worm herself again into his affections and achieve her nefarious end ? She was consummately pretty, that was a fact, and a nasty one to them.

Ethel continued :

"I have walked in the woods all night, thinking in my simple way—for I am quite unwise and ignorant—how I may escape him."

"Thou!" exclaimed both ladies.

"I," answered Ethel. "And now my course is clear to me, and I will travel by it."

The ladies were naturally curious. Their anxiety to know how Ethel proposed to act was quite painful. But to their questions she replied, without incivility, but quite firmly, that it was immaterial to them; and their offers of advice she refused upon the ground that she was perfectly satisfied with the method she had chosen, and that therefore their counsel, as it could do no more than convince her, would but occupy their valuable time to no purpose. They hated her for her reticence far more than had she avowed the most antagonistic intentions. And their hatred was the more galling, because they were under the necessity of confining it to the small area of their own bosoms. Guineva had not come unprepared with a bribe, and with the faint

hope that generosity might loosen its recipient's tongue, she laid a purse upon the table, with an amiable and condescending little speech; but Ethel said she did not require the money, and put the coppers back into the queen's hand. So then there was nothing for the great ladies to do but to depart; and this they did, with more rage in their breasts than such self-satisfied folks generally experience. Ethel presently closed the door behind her and walked into the wood.

It was a long and unpleasant journey to witch Griddel's hut. Griddel's hut was worthy of a witch. It stood in the midst of a barren marsh, and was approachable only by a meandering path of slimy stones. Frogs eternally croaked in the slush. A fetid mist hung over the hut, and the ground on which it stood looked like a precipitate of the floating abomination. The herons which, with the frogs, shared the sovereignty of the bog, stood before the hovel on one leg, as if they were afraid to set both feet upon so foul a spot. Before Ethel reached the door she heard a cracked

voice cry, “Come in, come in!” and when she entered she found Griddel sitting with her bared knees over a fire, picking leaves from a herb.

“I knew you were coming, beautiful Ethel, although I sit with my back to the window,” she said.

There was no mystery in this, for she had been craning her scraggy neck out of the window until a few moments of the present.

“Sit down, my child; I know what you want. You are in love, and come to me for a philtre or a potion—a potion will be best. I dreamed that last night, and I have been picking these herbs for you all the morning.” [Griddel drove a very good business in ministering to the ailments of sick lovers and sick cattle, and it required but little perspicacity to distinguish between the sorts of her customers.] “I know all about it, my dear; but you may as well tell me your story, for fear any trifle should slip my memory.”

Ethel went up to the witch and laid some money in her lap, and then withdrew.

Griddel looked from the money to Ethel, and then said :

“ Bless my soul ! how young, lovely, and beautiful thou art ! ”

“ Ah, me ! ” sighed Ethel ; “ everywhere the same cry—would I could hear something else different ! ”

“ The man is surely bewitched who loves not thee,” said Griddel ; “ but I warrant I’ll disenchant his eyes ! ”

“ But I want my love to love me not.”

“ I know that,” said Griddel sharply, though inconsistently. “ They want to marry you to an old man you despise—”

“ Not so.”

“ Dear me, dear me ! I’m thinking of the girl who’s coming to-morrow morning. I should have known better if you had but mentioned the young man’s name—let me see, by the way, what is it ? ”

“ King Eric.”

Griddel paused in the middle of a yawn over her herb-picking. This was something new, and consequently interesting.

“What wanteth King Eric?”

“To make me his wife and queen.”

“And what do you want?”

“To be not his wife.”

“Are you the child of a freedman?”

“My father was a villein.”

“Then you are the king’s slave, and may not deny him. If I conceal you from him, I am a traitor.”

“I do not wish you to conceal me. I only wish him to—to—love me not.”

Griddel was silent for some time; then she hazarded a supposition.

“The king loves thee for thy beauty.” She spoke with assurance, and, to Ethel in her present state of mind, what she said seemed like an oracular confirmation of all that had before presented itself to her.

“It is so, it is so, indeed?” she murmured, wringing her hands.

Griddel chuckled at her success, and after a time said:

“There are two methods of producing the king’s indifference: by a potion that

I am preparing, or by destroying your beauty."

"Which is the surer?"

"Oh! it will be surer to destroy your beauty, since that alone he loves you for," said Griddel hastily. She never poisoned a customer whilst there was an alternative.

"Canst thou do this?" asked Ethel.

"Yes, I can make thee horrible to look upon; I can make thee as ugly as myself." The witch turned upon Ethel, with a look of savage envy, and feasted her bloodshot yellow eyes on the lovely features of the girl, as she said:

"You must lose those beautiful blue eyes. Your mouth will be unlike mine whilst those teeth remain within it; they must come out. To make wrinkles in your brow and cheeks I must use red-hot skewers. We must burn your hair off to make you nicely bald; and your tongue must be split, or your voice will be too sweet. Your ears are too perfect, but I could alter them with my scissors in a twinkling. With those little alterations, your

head would be presentable. But we must manage to lame you in some way."

Ethel gave a little cry and sank upon a bench. Before her was a mirror, and she could see how beautiful her face was. A young girl's pride in her own charms had not been absent from her little head. Many a time had she smiled at her pretty reflection in the spring, and how often had her heart bounded when handsome King Eric stood silently admiring her beauty in the days when she enjoyed unquestioning love ! She was so young to become haggard and weird. Was she to lose so much—so soon—and for ever ? She was touched by her own loveliness, and hesitated to crush it—not from vanity, but a higher feeling : in like manner her soul would thrill at sight of a lovely flower, to crush which would seem to her an unholiness.

"Couldst thou not help me to escape from the country ? " she asked.

"What money hast thou ? "

"None ; I have given thee all that I possessed."

"And where thinkest thou a poor girl could go, whither a rich king might not follow and find her?"

Ethel could not answer that.

"Will it be very painful to suffer disfigurement?" she asked.

"No; here are poppies that will make thee sleep; and when thou awakest, all will be done. My daughter, who is in the woods gathering herbs, will be home shortly, and she will be quite delighted to help me. Thou hast but to say the word, and I will prepare the poppies at once."

Ethel rose, and said:

"Prepare them."

Then Griddel put poppies in her caldron, and made the fire burn with the herbs. Anon her daughter returned, and she was even more hideous than her mother; and, as Griddel had foretold, she evinced great delight at the prospect of mutilating Ethel. Mother and daughter put irons in the fire, and drew strange hooks and scissors and knives from drawers and boxes. When the poppies were stewed,

Ethel drank the liquor until she lost consciousness. Almost imperceptibly the happy thought of the sweet love she was relinquishing for ever faded from her mind, as the earth in the fulness of her beauty, slowly sinking into night and gloom, leaves behind her the glories of the sun she smiled beneath.

* * * *

King Eric could nowhere find his beloved Ethel when he sought her in the cottage and the wood on the following day. Through morning and noon and evening he sought her in the well-known haunts, and in vain. At night he called his courtiers to him, and bade them, as they loved him, assist him in his search. They carried flambeaux, and made the woods echo with the name of the king's bride. They reassembled in the morning at the palace, where, all haggard and wan, Eric met them, eagerly questioning each newcomer. When all had returned, he dispersed his army all over the kingdom, and offered the highest honours to whomsoever should bring back his lost maiden. Never before had the

queen been so devout. All day and all night she and Cuneguild were on their knees, praying for Ethel's deliverance out of the hands of her pursuers. As the king rode along he thought over every incident of his last meeting with Ethel : he remembered her sadness and constraint, and how she appeared to doubt his constancy. He recalled every word she said, repeating them again and again to himself. One passage more than another returned to him : "If I were as ugly as Griddel the witch, would you love me?" Suddenly he reined in his horse, and, turning to his friends, said :

"Who can guide me to the hut of Griddel the witch?"

A soldier uncovered his head, and said he could do so.

Eric bad him hasten forward ; and all followed wondering. When the king burst open Griddel's door, he looked eagerly round the dirty room. Griddel, with her knees over the fire as usual, was picking herbs, and save her none was present. There was no second

apartment ; but Eric's new born conviction was unshaken. He went up to Griddel, and asked :

“ Where is Ethel ? ”

“ I know not , ” answered the witch.

The king's followers shook their heads despondingly at one another ; but one picked up a fragment of russet cloth, and put it in Eric's hand.

“ Thou liest ! ” he said fiercely to the witch ; “ here is a piece of her gown . ”

“ Nay ; that is part of my daughter's dress, who is gathering simples in the wood. Presently she will return ; then thou shalt see that I lie not . ”

At this moment another of the king's friends cried to him ; Eric, turning, found him examining the ground.

“ Here is blood, king . ”

“ I killed a heron this morning , ” muttered the witch.

Nobody heeded her ; and there was a dead silence whilst they stooped to examine the sodden earth. The silence was broken by a

faint moan that came from above. There was a general exclamation; and Griddel, springing from her seat, threw herself at the king's feet imploring his clemency, and vowing to tell all if he would pardon her. But they knew now sufficient. By means of a ladder found outside the hut, they ascended to the miserable loft above the room. Light struggled through the many holes and fissures in the dilapidated thatch, sufficient for them to distinguish a figure stretched upon a heap of rubbish in a corner of the place. The king would suffer none but himself to approach, and taking the moaning creature in his arms with the utmost tenderness, he carried her down the ladder.

“Great God, what is this?” he cried, as he looked now at her he carried.

She was a little deformed woman—bald, toothless, sightless, with a seared face and clipped ears.

“Pardon me, pardon me!” howled the witch.

“Tell me,” said Eric, seizing her by the throat with his disengaged hand, “who is this?”

“Ethel.”

The king groaned, and relaxed his hold on Griddel’s throat; but still he clasped to his bosom the mutilated girl.

“My daughter will tell thee that we did this at the girl’s own desire; nay, she will tell thee as much thyself if she can speak. Tell, tell !”

The unhappy creature faintly bent her head.

“O Ethel, Ethel,” said the king, “couldst thou not believe me without this terrible test ! My poor, poor love, wilt thou believe me now ?”

Her wretched arms crept about his neck, and she laid her mutilated face upon his bosom. Then he said to his courtiers :

“Go ye before me, and prepare everything for the wedding and the feast. I will follow with my bride. I shall marry her before the sun sinks.” Then he said to his soldiers : “Follow me, and with ye bring Griddel the witch.”

That night they were wedded, the bride making her responses in dumb show, for her

tongue was split. All did their best to be merry at the feast, except the dowager queen. She, in a reactionary spirit after her prayerfulness, spent the night and the following day in perpetual cursing.

Griddel was handed over to the Justices of the Peace, who, if they were no more merciful than those of the present time, seasoned their cruelty with perhaps a little more justice. And so Griddel and Guineva, and also Cuneguild, disappear from this story.

II.

Ethel's transition from girlhood to womanhood was less rapid than that by which Eric became a man. Had years of sadness and experience taken the place of the last ten days, none had been surprised. Every youthful amusement was laid aside, and with them his gay carelessness. He was thoughtful and grave; his time, when he was not by his wife's side, was entirely occupied in discovering the

real state of his kingdom, and in what manner he could best conduct its government for the benefit of his people. Kindly, yet firmly, he removed his mamma's fine old oligarchy, and abolished the ingenious imposts of his cousin Cuneguild. He never smiled except when he was beside his poor wife. At these times he assumed his old gaiety and sprightliness, that she might find no difference in his manner, and suspect no change in his affection. Sometimes he would try to sing the blithe old hunting-songs she had loved to hear. As the memory of their sweetly happy days came upon him he would weep, but he still sung, whilst the tears rolled down his cheeks ; and when his emotion made his voice quiver and break, he would leave off with a gay laugh, and say, " Ah me, ah me, Ethel, I'm getting an old man now!" Had she not lost her sight, she would have seen how little real irony there was in this. Her pains and afflictions made her irritable and petulant at times ; then he would kiss her scarred forehead in sorrowing pity for her unhappiness. He tried to interest

her in the business of state, and told her all his plans, asking her approval. She always nodded, when he put questions to her, and sometimes very inappropriately ; so that Eric feared his wife's reason, as well as her body, had been injured. She could not speak for many months ; and then the few words she could articulate were in a voice harsh and discordant, and her words seemed as harsh and inharmonious as their tone.

Eric never referred to past times, feeling that if he deplored the change, how much more must she who had made so fearful a mistake, and suffered for it in so fearful a kind and degree ! Like the consciousness of a foul sin hung about him the remembrance of the levity which had been attended by such consequences ; and his happiest hours were those when the cares and difficulties of governing diverted his attention from his own and his wife's unhappiness. In this way five tedious years crept away. The goodness, the justice, the gravity, the wisdom, and the sorrows of

the old-young king were proverbial over all the land. Kings sought his counsel, and tried to return the benefit of his friendship in costly gifts: but they got to know that the most acceptable present they could make was such as by its novelty or ingenuity could amuse the imbecile queen. For, indeed, when she was not in a frenzy of unprovoked anger, she was apparently idiotic. Her misery and sufferings wrought her to paroxysms of impotent rage, and left her bewildered and dazed. Every faculty and sense was perverted and debased. Although she partly recovered her sight, she could find no delight in the sweet objects that had given her pleasure in former and happier times. The sweetest flowers she pushed angrily from her or tore to pieces petulantly. Perhaps it was that objects of beauty reminded her of that she wished to forget. Eric tried to please her with music; but her soul seemed utterly dead to its charms, and when he introduced it a second time, she was enraged. Toys gave her pleasure for a while; and an ape that the king of Mercia had sent caused her amuse-

ment. She liked to tease the confined brute, and make it chatter and shake the bars of its cage in its anger. Some sent her luscious fruits and viands, and these she would devour with insatiable appetite. Eric himself sought for things to divert her; and any traveller bringing curiosities from foreign lands was sure of a purchaser in him. One day a merchant who had been trading in Barbary brought a pretty Indian slave-boy he had purchased there. Eric took the boy to his wife, and asked if she would like him for her page. She nodded; so he paid the merchant handsomely, and bade him bring any other novelty he might meet with in the course of his travels.

The boy was dark, as Indians are; but his features were remarkably pretty, and their expression was sweetly amiable. He had learnt a few words of English; they were sufficient to show the gentle kindness of his thoughts. He was no less patient than good King Eric under the waywardness of the queen, but more successful than he in appeasing her. His tact

and ability in soothing away the irritability of the unhappy queen, Eric in vain sought to emulate. And in this gentle occupation the good and kind lad never tired. Eric began to hope that in time the page might restore the queen to her former sweetness of disposition. Notably her fits of anger were less frequent. During the day the boy was constantly near her ; and his ingenuity gave her no time to reflect upon the past. Eric saw that the secret of her present happiness was in the forgetfulness of the past, and therefore he kept away from her as much as possible. He could not but be aware that his presence pained her ; for she shunned him on all occasions, and would leave the room when he entered it. As time progressed, he more rarely than ever saw his wife ; yet his heart yearned towards the wretched creature. In place of the passion of youth had come that divine love that springs from pity and compassion. He would pass a long time by her door, or in pacing the corridor outside her apartment. When Ethel slept, the page would creep stealthily from her side, to

talk to the grave loving king of her whom only he loved, knowing that this was his sole pleasure. The king would thank him and pat his fair curly head, and sometimes in fine nights they would lean together upon the balcony, Eric narrating again and again the story of his early love, and telling of the queen's former sweetness and beauty. The boy was tender-hearted, and his eyes ever filled with tears to hear one so sad and silent tell of his mirth and gaiety. When their conversation was ended, Eric would kiss the boy's shining head, and he the king's robe, as is the Eastern custom.

One night when they had parted, the page, instead of returning to his room, wandered from the terrace into the garden. It was so lovely a night that he was tempted to stroll beyond the palace grounds and into the woods, where the sward was chequered with the light that found its way through the green boughs. It was such a calm still night as tempts one to wander on and on purposelessly: the immediate enjoyment derived from the cool fra-

grant air was sufficient inducement to linger in it. His steps brought him at last to a deserted cottage. The creeping plants that had originally decorated the porch completely overgrew the little building. The page paused before the crumbling gate, and looked with some curiosity at the wild uncultivated growth of weeds and flowers, and then, crossing the grass-grown path, he put his hand upon the half-opened door and looked within. Upon a rude bench, with his arms spread upon a table and his head resting on his arms, there sat good King Eric. The page could see it was he, for, aroused perhaps by the footfall, light as that was, he raised his face and looked towards the door. His hair looked grey in the moonlight, and yet not inconsistent with the cold wan face it shaded. Ah me ! will the warm golden sunshine ever again fall upon that head, or is it silvern for ever in perpetual night ?

Quickly the boy withdrew, yet not so rapidly as not to be seen ; he heard the king exclaim, and from the brake in which he threw

himself for concealment he saw him looking amazed on every side.

The following morning the king told him that he had seen a vision—that as he sat in Ethel’s early home, he saw for one moment his wife with the young sweet face of old. The boy did not undeceive him; for the deception was evidently a great happiness to him. Many a time Eric passed his nights in the cottage; but never saw the vision there again. Elsewhere it several times appeared to him. His excited brain was prepared to receive such illusions. Once, as he stood at the queen’s door and believed her to be sleeping, he fancied he heard her weeping, and between her sobs she said in her old musical low voice, “My poor king, my king!” He opened her door. The page came to him.

“Does my wife call?” he asked.

“She sleeps, sire,” answered the page.

The king’s eyes were fixed upon his wife’s face, or he would have noticed that his page’s cheek was wet. Another time, on opening a door, he saw reflected in a mirror a face, and

stopped dead still. The face was Ethel's—the face of time past. He advanced, and the vision was gone. Only the page was in the room.

And now the queen's health broke under her afflictions, and she lay in a precarious condition. She was entirely powerless, and her petulance quite disappeared. Indeed, it seemed that her former tenderness had at last returned ; for she smiled upon the king, and let her hand lie in his. He never left her side, save for brief intervals of repose. Never from the first had he been to her aught but most kind ; and now he could be no more. He could not hope a life so full of pain would be prolonged. He would leave her for nothing. He said to his page,

“Take this ring, my faithful boy ; go into my throne and act for me. My grief will not let me govern wisely or well. Thee I can trust.”

Indeed it was time some one looked to affairs. For the queen-mother, hearing of the king's preoccupation, took the opportunity to stir up

her unfortunate kinsfolk to rebellion, pointing out that by a sudden descent upon the palace Eric might be captured, and his throne appropriated by themselves. The arrangement of this *coup* showed that Guineva's diplomatic ability was as admirable as ever. There was to be no noise, no scandal, and no bloodshed—if avoidable. But the king had reposed his trust to no fool. The page's softness did not extend to his head. Knowing the queen's craft, he was prepared for craftiness.

When no less than six of the king's uncles, Guineva's brothers, had called seriatim to inquire after the sick queen's health, and all spun out the time over their biscuit and wine to unconscionable length, the page, under pretence of bringing them farther intelligence of the queen, withdrew. He returned, however, in time to meet Beod the seventh brother—a clumsy hulking rascal, who greeted his brothers with very ill-feigned surprise, and sat down to his wine and biscuit without asking a word about anybody. After that the page was not at all surprised when an eighth ring

at the visitors' bell was followed by the appearance of Guineva and Cuneguild.

The affection with which the ladies were embraced by their masculine relatives was affecting from its warmth and unanimity. Dr. Watts would have been ravished by this display of fraternal love. When these brothers agreed to anything particularly dastardly, they did agree. They acted harmoniously and in concord. Rather oddly they failed to resume their seats after this outburst of affection, but clustered silently behind their sister, looking foolish enough. Guineva had feminine tact, and was extremely affable and condescending with the page. She spoke collectively for herself and brothers. They were so interested in the poor dear queen. No better? They were so sorry! They supposed the king was with her? He was always so tender-hearted, they should like to see the poor thing before going (this desire was echoed unanimously by the brothers, who said, "So should we," with one voice, like an opera chorus). Their amiability knew no bounds. When the page explained that it

would be impossible for them to see the king because he would not leave the queen, nor her because, the grand staircase being under repair, the royal apartments were accessible only by a dark, narrow, and circuitous passage, unworthy to be trodden by such mighty feet, they replied that this mattered little to them, and that their errand of love was not to be hindered by such slight inconveniences. All grinned most complacently as they followed the page to the door, and advanced into the passage, where he, as his position required, suffered them to precede him.

“Come along, dear brothers,” said the old dowager.

Whercupon, as if it had been a signal, each drew his sword. When they all had passed into the passage, the page closed the door and put the bar up. Meanwhile the king’s anxious relations marched along the passage and, finally, into a cool and clean stone dungeon.*

* Subsequently they impeached each other of treason. The brothers, losing their estates, wandered abroad, and did the best they could with their titles. Guineva took

The king was worn with watching, and his fatigue showed itself in his face; the queen, with a smile that seemed to banish her hideousness, raised his hand to her lips, and said, “Go, my loving husband.”

He kissed her scarred cheek, and said to his page,

“Thou wilt watch tenderly and carefully as I could, that I know. Promise to call me if any change takes place.”

When the page had promised, Eric withdrew. But though he lay down he could not sleep. His eager ear caught the sound of his queen’s voice; and going into the ante-room he heard her say,

“Listen, my page. I never loved the king until now, and now it is as if I were waking from a fearful dream to the consciousness of good. He is so good that but for his sake I could wish to live. For his sake I long to die.”

“But he loves you dearly,” said the page.

housekeeper’s situation, and Cunegild married a horse-doctor.

“ He loves me in pity. He loves me for that which is past. Last night, when he thought I slept, he rose and sat for hours gazing on a miniature that he carries in his bosom. He still loves her he should have married.”

“ Cuneguild ?” said the page.

“ I know not.”

Eric returned to his couch. What would it avail to explain or protest now ? In the night the queen grew worse, and the page, leaving her, went to the king’s bedside. He was lying with a locket against his lips ; eagerly, yet with trembling fingers, the page lifted it to the light. He dropped it with a cry of joy.

“ Who calls ?” exclaimed the king, springing to his feet.

“ I, my liege ; the queen asks for thee.”

“ Methought it was herself that woke me from my dream,” said the king. Then he went to the side of the dying queen.

“ King Eric,” said she, “ wilt thou forgive me ?”

“ Ay,” said the king.

“ Dost thou remember Griddel the witch ?”

The king bowed his head.

“She was my mother.”

Eric started to his feet; but his wife held his hand tightly, and continued,

“When we were about to mutilate her thou lovest, my mother’s cousin, a mariner and pirate, interrupted us, and offered us a purse of gold for the girl. My mother sold her to him, and burned and cut me that I should take the girl’s place. Wilt thou forgive me? Oh! I too have suffered!”

“From my heart I forgive thee, poor wife!” said Eric.

Then the queen lay back with a smile, and seemed gradually to fade away. Suddenly she raised herself upon her elbow, and whispered in her cracked voice,

“The pirate took girls into Barbary for slaves—seek there thy darling.”

She was dead now, and by her side sat good King Eric, stupefied, for a whole hour. Then he rose from her bedside, and went to the window, and looking out into the wide world, said aloud,

“Where, where shall I find thee, Ethel, my lost darling?”

And the page, taking his hand, pressed it to her lips and to her bosom, and said,

“Here!”



Schwartzenschwein.



SCHWARTZENSCHWEIN.

WHEN wicked barons lived in the Rhine castles, and trap-doors and sliding-panels were arrangements without which no gentleman's house was complete; when ghosts could be seen without the assistance of science, and dark deeds were perpetually coming to light; when virtue was in the exclusive possession of the humble and the fair, and a man, when he disliked his wife, instead of breaking her heart, in a less civilised manner broke her head—then lived the Graf von Schwartzenschwein. The Graf von Schwartzenschwein inhabited a castle that stood on the top of a towering rock, and this castle was called

Teufelswerk. A legend exists that the founder of the Schwartzenschwein line, in building the castle, found the difficulty of getting the materials to the top of the hill insurmountable, and therefore sought the assistance of the devil; a pact was made, and the castle was raised in a single night, the fiend stipulating that the building should be used solely for nefarious purposes. The Teufelswerk was accessible by but one path that wound round the rock and was open in every part to the castle above. The path was wide enough for only one man; and no rail or protection of any kind bordered its precipitous edge. While his provisions lasted, one man in the Teufelswerk could defy all the armies in the world. So the country round and about for many a league paid rates and taxes with great punctuality to the Schwartzenschweins, who showed their right to these imposts in their power to take it. It must be admitted that the Grafs von Schwartzenschwein let their lands at a low rental; this, with the knowledge that they were not much worse than other

gentlemen of the period, was the inducement to folks to become their tenants. The ground was rich, and vineyards and teeming pastures spread over the hills and valleys; there corn waved in the summer, and in the autumn barges bore loads of red grain that weighted them to the water's edge down to Köln and elsewhere.

Never had the district been more prosperous than now; for, in addition to excellent crops, the people were blessed with a miracle of amiable leniency in the person of the present Graf, their landlord. Unattended he visited the villagers, kissed their wives, gave peppermint to their children, and interested himself in their affairs with paternal kindness. His small army descended from the castle only to pursue the robber armies of neighbouring gentlemen, from whose depredations the villagers occasionally suffered. If a fault he had, it was amiability: sturdy malcontents called him ninecompoop. But he had been wedded thrice, and possibly his wives had exercised their softening influence upon him;

thus rushlights are affected when placed in hot water.

Ober Bergheim lay at the foot of the Teufelswerk rock, and was separated from Unter Bergheim by the Rhine. Oldwife Grisel kept the ferry between the two villages, and she held the cottage and enough ground for her vegetables and cow rent-free from the Graf, in consideration of her fastening the ferry-boat nightly to the foot of his path. What night-service her ferry was used in may here be stated. The Graf's tender care for the welfare of his tenants rendered him particularly nervous with respect to fire. The merest simulacrum of a fire-engine was at Köln, and could not be brought to the scene of action under four days. So he instituted a kind of curfew; at the firing of a beacon upon the Teufelswerk every villager had to retire within his cottage, put out all lights, and go to bed. Any one found out after the signal was regarded as a law-breaker, and treated with severity. To insure obedience to this rule the Graf occasionally descended at night, accompanied by a

few well-armed giants, and employed the ferry.

Grisel was now bedridden, but her son Rudolph carried on the business, and besides kept the cottage neat, cultivated the garden, tended the cow, and provided for every want of his old mother. Rudolph was the best-hearted, handsomest, brightest fellow in the world. He could compose songs and sing them like any troubadour; in feats of strength and skill he beat the champions of all villages round and about. His soft hair was the colour of ripe corn, and hung in waving masses upon his shoulders; and he had the shapeliest leg you can imagine. The business he did quite astounded his mother; but the poor old soul was nearly blind, so she could not see her son's attractions so well as the maidens with their bright young eyes could. The little housekeepers of Unter Bergheim could find no eggs or butter like the butter and eggs in Ober Bergheim; and the little housekeepers of Ober Bergheim for their part could find nothing comparable in their own

village to the eggs and butter of Unter Bergheim. And there never were young maids with such shocking bad memories as these possessed. They were continually fetching forgotten articles, for if they did not forget one commodity they forgot the other, and some actually forgot both. So the ferryman had quite enough to do between one and the other. In the evening many of these little maids would come in smart ribbons and snowy frills to talk with Oldwife Grisel, who, to be sure, was not very entertaining with her complaints and her complainings. Sometimes they would bring little presents of their own making for the old woman. And before they returned to their homes, they would stroll just once round Rudolph's garden to see the wonderful jasmine that grew about the dead pear-tree ; they stood very patiently while Rudolph twined sprays in their braided hair. Rudolph's red cow always would come to the edge of the orchard and put her sleepy head over the sweetbriar hedge to have her nose stroked. This led them all into the orchard,

where Rudolph would shake an apple-tree over the girls' heads, frightening them to death with the shower of rosy fruit. Each must put an apple in her pocket for a dream-charm. The orchard went down to the river's side, and as the sun set, spreading a mellow light over the vine-covered hills, they sang songs, with the water rippling accompaniment at their feet. They sat there, and their song, as the light waned, became sweetly sad, and so they sung until the detestable beacon began to smoke. Then each went her way, with happy tears in her eyes and the apple pressed against her lips; whilst Rudolph, little dreaming of their thoughts or of his own importance in the world, whistled lightly as he fastened the boat to the foot of the Teufelswerk path.

The fixed period the Graf von Schwartenschwein had devoted to mourning for his third wife was expired, and to inaugurate the happy issue, he commanded the good villagers to assemble in the market-place of Bergheim and make merry with song and dance and drinking of wines. No beacon was to be fired that

night, but bonfires were to be lit at dusk, and dancing was to be round them whilst they burned. The Graf himself promised to be of the party, and as his ability in dancing was only second to his capacity in drinking, a very pleasant time of it was anticipated by all. Everybody prepared for enjoyment. The girls had mysterious whisperings with the goodwife of the carrier whose barge plied between Bergheim and Köln, the result whereof afterwards appeared in surprisingly graceful trinkets and finery. Rudolph early intimated to his customers that he should not ply upon the fête-day afternoon, as he was to compete in a running-match for a green cap. He wished none of his friends to be absent on the occasion, so he begged them to come early—a very unnecessary injunction, you may be sure. Particularly he told Brunhilda, the vine-dresser's daughter, of his early-closing movement.

Now Brunhilda was undoubtedly the handsomest girl in the two villages; and she knew it. And of all the girls that crossed in his boat, Rudolph paid her the most atten-

tion ; and she knew that. But the other girls spoke lightly of her charms, and declared Rudolph would not go a yard out of his way to please her ; and that also she knew. She thought what a triumph it would be to show how great her charms were and their effect upon Rudolph ; and then a little wickedness came into her heart, and she determined upon risking everything for the sake of this triumph. And that is how there ever came to be a story to tell about these people.

When the morning arrived, Rudolph had enough work to tire any one but Rudolph for the rest of the day. By midday all the holiday-makers had crossed the river but one. Brunhilda had not arrived. To Rudolph's questions, those who had seen her told him she was sitting idly in her window. Twelve was past, and still Rudolph sat in his boat, his eye fixed on the point where Brunhilda should long since have appeared. Only an old man with a pig came, and he knew nothing of the fête. Each minute seemed an hour, yet he waited, hoping each moment she

would appear, and making excuses for her absence to himself. His friends missed him, and came down begging him not to be late for the competition.

“Oh! I shall be there in time for that,” said Rudolph, laughing. Time wore on, and presently they came again to say that everything was prepared, and the race only waited for him. Then he lost his temper, and told them to run their race without him, and that he would sit in his boat till nightfall rather than it should be said he cared more for a green cap and his own pleasure than the happiness of a friend. But for all that, if he had not lost his temper, he would have gone. Presently he heard a shout from beyond the poplars, and knew that the race had been run without him: the next minute he saw Brunhilda coming down the hill. He pretended he did not see, but why, after watching for her so long, is hard to say. She was frightened at her own enormity, and called softly to him with a trembling voice that went to Rudolph’s kind heart at once; and he would have “made

it up" there and then if he hadn't previously made up his mind to be very angry. He handed her into the boat without speaking a word, and sat down to his oars as if he had been an old man. Brunhilda felt how stupid and unkind she had been, and that she must conciliate.

"Have you been waiting for me?" she asked; she could not think of anything else to say.

"You know I have," said Rudolph; and then Brunhilda knew she had said something that was rather worse than nothing, and quite in character with her proceedings, and that she was very silly. So she held her tongue and would have liked to cry. Only the dip of the oars as they crossed the river broke the silence. She thought how pleasant it would be to be lying dead at the bottom of the river; then Rudolph would love her and weep for her. In silence he helped her to land, and silently they walked towards the village. Then Rudolph thought it was stupid to be dumb when there was so much to talk

about, and to bear malice for what perhaps, after all, was unavoidable, so he asked in a kind tone why she had not come. Brunhilda would not tell a lie, and could not tell the truth, so she did not answer at all. Before Rudolph could find out something else to say that might restore harmony, two young men ran eagerly up to him, and began describing the race, which had been won by a fellow from Unter Bergheim, to the discredit of Rudolph's village. They were full of the race, and could talk of nothing else, so Brunhilda walked beside with a stricken conscience, and nobody to talk to her. The three young men seemed not to notice her at all. However, it was better to be unnoticed than to be pointed out and laughed at as she was when they were in the village. At first she was humbled, but shortly her heart passed from the melting into the hardening stage, and her eyes, instead of sparkling with repentant tears, glittered with defiance. When the music struck up for the dance she eluded Rudolph, to whom she had promised her hand weeks

before ; but he was in good temper now, and would not have his sport spoiled a second time ; so when he could not find Brunhilda, he looked around to see what pretty girl he might choose in her place. The very prettiest was Dorothe, the daughter of the rich farmer Werner. At another time he would not have dared to speak to one so grand ; but as the occasion sanctioned it, and she had a very pleasant and inviting expression in her big eyes when they met his, he promptly offered himself and was accepted. She danced like a fairy ; and those who were not too busy about their own steps were lost in admiration of the young couple. Beautiful Brunhilda too saw them, and the blood flooded her fair cheeks ; that made her look handsomer than ever. It was just then that the Graf von Schwartzenschwein observed her. Instantly he was struck with her beauty, and without more ado presented himself to her as a partner. This was some satisfaction ; if the Graf was less handsome (indeed he was very plain), he was ten thousand times greater than Rudolph. So she

smiled, and did her very utmost to dance gracefully and outvie Dorothe. But the chief excellence of the Graf's dancing was its steady sureness, of which he was decidedly proud, as well as of his power of endurance. It was very difficult to be graceful ; but she did her best, and they stood up longer than any others. Still Brunhilda was not so pleased with her dance or her partner as Dorothe was with hers.

The Graf was a killing man, which was perhaps the cause of his winning three wives and—losing them. His attack to-night was solely upon the heart of beautiful Brunhilda, and with apparent success. She was never too tired to dance with him ; she laughed at everything he said. When he approached, her lids shaded her eyes modestly ; when she left him, her eyes shot Parthian glances. But ever and anon her smile faded and her eyes looked eagerly, strenuously, after Rudolph. He too was laughing, but the smile never left his lips, and no anxiety was in his eyes when they left the face of Dorothe. There was all

the difference between being and trying to be happy. At midnight he had to return to his ferry : the fires were not half consumed, but the old people wished to get home. When Dorothe crossed in his boat he dared not speak to her ; he was only a ferryman now, and her rich father sat beside her. But as he helped her to land from the boat after her father, his hand held more than the tips of her fingers, and lingered in the folds of her dress a moment longer than was necessary, and got a little pinch for its temerity. The moon was wonderfully bright, and he could see her large sweet eyes beaming a warmer farewell than the formal adieu that left her lips. A feeling quite new to him filled Rudolph's breast as he sat quietly in his boat looking into the water, after Dorothe had left him. He had no wish to return to the *fête*: all he desired was to sit there and think, think, think ; pondering every little incident that had occurred to *them* ; repeating the most trivial word she had spoken ; all tenderly sad now that she was gone. Poor Brunhilda had gone

quite out of his thoughts ; when she took her seat in the ferry he was as surprised to see her there as if he had not seen her for years. The Graf was accompanying her, and paying her the most elaborate compliments and attention. Rudolph, behind his back, smiled and winked significantly to Brunhilda. Then she felt that all her efforts had been in vain ; he was not even jealous.

After this, Brunhilda found comestibles to her taste in her own village. Financially, Oldwife Grisel did not lose much thereby ; for in Brunhilda's place a customer came in the person of Dorothe, who had discovered a dear friend on the other side of the river requiring a daily visit. Somehow, too, Dorothe got to know Oldwife Grisel, and was henceforth one of the number who took interest in her ailments, and in the jasmine and the cow, and who sang songs under the trees by the river. I do not think she said much about these delights at home ; but her father, good man, had so much ado to count up his money that he never missed her when she was away, nor disturbed his calcula-

tions by needless inquiries when she was at home. Her brother, Hurldebrand, was very proud, but as he was also very devout, he could not object to Dorothe's visiting poor bedridden old Grisel: it was advisable the poor old creature, so soon to leave this world, should be able to tell Peter how worthy of a free admission the aristocracy of Bergheim was.

Soon the leaves fell from the trees; the grass was damp in the evening; the cow was housed in the shed; the jasmine faded; and the maidens had to sit at home knitting warm clothes for the coming winter. Grisel's ailments increased, and even the constant attention of her son and Dorothe could not satisfy her. How patient and good Dorothe was! No one but she could have borne the continual grumblings of the old woman. Indeed, except her son, Grisel would suffer no one else to be beside her. When Hurldebrand, with holy condescension, visited her, she told him this, and he left, very well satisfied that he could be of no further service. The evenings were early dark, and wolves had been seen;

so Rudolph was obliged to walk partly home with Dorothe and protect her from harm. But if the path were really dangerous, it was surely unwise to linger so long in it; but then nobody is wise until he or she is too old and ugly to be otherwise. Once when a big dog crossed the road, it looked in the mist like a wolf, and Dorothe was terribly scared and nestled quite close to Rudolph. He put his arm around her, and talked about being for ever a protector to shield her from the dangers besetting life's path, or some nonsense of the kind, which Dorothe thought the most beautiful poetry she had ever listened to. To hear such talk would have scared the rich Werner from his money-bags or the proud Hurldebrand into fits; but it in nowise frightened Dorothe, who nestled still in Rudolph's arms, with her face resting against his breast, and smiling all the time as if she liked it. After that these two walked hand-in-hand like children, and, like children, innocently happy. That this position of affairs remained unnoticed is not to be imagined. It was everybody's

talk. The villagers marvelled that so rich a farmer as Werner should marry his daughter to a ferryman—for of course the future of the young couple was far more definite to everybody than to themselves—and congratulated Oldwife Grisel on her son's good fortune. Only Werner and Hurldebrand were ignorant of the affair. As has been said, Werner had enough to do to count his money, and Hurldebrand was far too genteel to enter into conversation with anybody, and too good to think of anything but polemics.

Meanwhile, love-making was proceeding in another place. Graf von Schwartzenschwein was openly paying his addresses to Brunhilda, and shortly it was announced to the world that he would marry again, and that Brunhilda should be his fourth wife. Already she had been taken up to the Teufelswerk, and the magnificence she there beheld made her eager to become mistress of such a home—perhaps. Perhaps her heart ached, and she longed to be away from the village by the river, where now was nothing that gave her joy. And so in

the springtime there was another fête in Bergheim by command of the Graf, who on these occasions was particularly festive, and did not contribute one bottle to the festival. The Graf's soldiers came down in a body as a guard of honour, and very ferocious and unclean faces appertained to that body. When the time came for the bride to go to her home, the guard formed in single file, holding a rope in one hand and a torch in the other. The Graf and his wife were placed in the centre; then the rope was pulled tight to protect them from the precipice; and they moved upwards along the perilous path. The Graf had been enjoying himself, and required this protection. Brunhilda, too, required support; her knees trembled beneath her; and when she turned round to look back once more on her old friends and associates, Rudolph said, "Poor Brunhilda, see how pale she is: that precipice is enough to scare any one!" All saw them as they moved upwards, and wound round the hill. At last they were seen to reach the castle, and even then Brunhilda's white dress

could be distinguished. They entered the gate, and all was dark.

Said the Graf to his wife : “ You do nothing all day but weep. You are a pleasant companion for a man to have as his wife. But you shall do something else : you shall work. That will cure you ! ”

“ Until you let me go down from this miserable castle, I’ll do only what I please. Work I won’t, and no one on earth shall make me work ! ” cried Brunhilda, stamping her foot angrily.

“ Hum ! we shall see,” said the Graf. Then he rose, left the room, and presently returned with two sturdy ruffians at his heels.

“ Are you going to kill me ? ” quietly asked Brunhilda. The Graf laughed as if nothing so absurdly ridiculous had ever been suggested to his mind before, and then he nodded to the men, who, without giving Brunhilda the option of walking, lifted her from the ground and carried her down a flight of steps cut in the rock and into a cell dismal and dark.

The cell also was cut in the rock. Its sides rose pyramidal to a small grating, through which the light was admitted in quantity sufficient only to show obscurely the wretchedness of the dungeon. A spinning-wheel and a stool with three legs, a pitcher of water, and trencher of bread, were all the room contained excepting a mass of flax which lay a foot thick upon the ground. The men set Brunhilda down.

“There,” said the Graf; “there’s work that will do you good and drive the nonsense out of your head. I’ll be bound by the time you’ve spun this flax you’ll be glad enough to talk to some one: and until you have spun this flax to the last fibre here you remain.”

Brunhilda kicked the spinning-wheel across the room, and sat upon the stool, turning her back contemptuously on the Graf. “Here will I sit rather than return to thee,” she said.

“We shall see,” said the Graf. “By the way,” he added, “my three former wives departed their lives from this apartment. I

hope your dreams will be agreeable ;" and with a brutal mockery of a laugh, he closed the door and turned the key in it. Brunhilda heard him and the men ascending the steps. There was a second door at the head of the steps ; this also was slammed, and the bolt shot upon it.

She resolved she would never move whilst she had life from the stool she sat upon, and thinking upon her wrongs fixed her determination. Hours passed, and the light faded away. A star twinkled down upon her through the grating, and her thoughts went from her wrongs to her sorrows, and by natural transition to her happiness, now all passed away and gone like the light ; and only sweet memory, like the star above, reflected the morning light of her life. She thought of the summer evenings of a year since ; she pictured the vine-clothed banks of the river, Rudolph's ferry, the orchard, the evening song, perhaps being sung now by voices as happy as hers was then. She wondered if one of those gay souls ever thought for one moment of her ;

and then she threw herself upon the flax and wept. Presently she slept; but what terrible dreams she had of unhappy girls shut in cells until, mad with despair, they dashed their lives out against the black stone walls, were too terrible to tell. She groaned and writhed in her sleep, and when she awoke it was with a strange choking sensation in her throat. She realised her position; she was lying on the flax-covered ground of the cell; more thoroughly awake, she became conscious that her head was lying beneath the level of her body. Yet when she raised her head and moved the flax, she found the boarded floor beneath perfectly level. The only thing strange about it was that it should be boarded when all else about the rough-hewn chamber was bare and crude. The movement must have been a delusion of her waking senses. But when again her head pressed the floor the phenomenon recurred: her head hung downwards; she could feel that by the tightening sensation about her throat. Resting upon her knees, more carefully she examined the spot, pressing

her hand upon the floor where her head had rested. Easily, noiselessly, it yielded to the pressure, returning to its position with the removal of her hand. Terror seized her, and she trembled violently. She sprang to her feet, yet feared to move lest she might tread upon a treacherous part. At this moment she heard the bolt shot back in the upper door. Quickly she seated herself upon the stool : that she knew was on firm ground. The door behind her opened, and a harsh voice said :

“Are you here ?”

There was, then, the possibility that she might not have been !

“Yes, I am here ; and here I shall stay,” answered Brunhilda, purposely implying a misconception of the question. The man, now accustomed to the gloom, saw her still seated on the stool. He had brought food : this he set down without a word, and shut the door. The sound of his heavy footsteps terminated with the slamming of the second door.

Impelled by curiosity and the hope her

partial discovery aroused, Brunhilda, with much caution, crept to the place where last night she had so heedlessly flung herself. Once more the floor gave beneath her hand and receded as if turning upon an opposite hinge, and the flax slid down upon her hand. She cleared the flax aside, and pushed again to find what lay beneath. The light streaming from above fell upon the boards as they moved, until it passed their edge and was lost in the vacuity beneath. Holding the trap back with her right, she thrust her left arm carefully over the border of the floor on which she lay; she could feel the under side of the floor, but besides that, in all directions, nothing. Testing the floor at each movement, she examined the trap from end to end. It extended almost the entire length of the chamber; the narrow margin of secure footing at either end being no wider than one could stand upright upon with safety. The width she calculated by the wheel she had kicked from her: this was displaced by the movement of the trap, but did not move in proportion. It lay partly upon it. She be-

lieved she could jump, if she were compelled, right across the trap. To a slice of the bread brought her by her gaoler she tied a wisp of flax, and let it down the hole. Depended to the furthest its weight was unaltered. She let the flax slip from her fingers, then listened. . . . “The bread is not hard enough to make a noise,” she was saying, when a sound almost musical came from the depths. She felt dizzy and sick, before she quite realised what this sound implied: that she lay above a well or shaft, the bottom whereof was as low as the Rhine. Probably the water beneath was the Rhine water. It ran into strange tunnels and caverns which seemed roofless. A torch held up in some parts showed nothing. Many a time had Rudolph taken her into those caverns with his boat, frightening her with fearful stories, and with the strange echoes that replied to his voice.

When the gaoler came again to the cell, and found Brunhilda still sitting on her stool, he laughed as if it were a joke. A week passed; still he found her constantly sitting in the same

spot and in the same attitude. His astonishment was expressed in suitable but unprintable speech. In his next visit he was accompanied by the Graf and a flambeau. Schwartzenschwein had evidently come to assure himself of the truth ; he examined his wife and the cell with some curiosity. Everything was unaltered. The despised wheel lay in the middle of the chamber ; the flax lay a foot deep on the floor ! Brunhilda sat composedly on her three-legged stool with her arms folded. He gently remonstrated, with an accent of affectionate sorrow in his voice, pointing out to her the iniquity of stubborn opposition to a fond husband's desire ; he finally begged her to jump up like a good little wife as she was, and fetch the wheel. But Brunhilda told him she preferred idleness to his company at present, and that she was not a bit tired of sitting on her stool. The gaoler was tickled, and ventured to laugh ; the Graf, despite his amiability, took up the water-pitcher, and broke it on the unwise joker's head. Then the door was banged-to, and not till the second was shut

no less violently were Brunhilda's ears unshocked by the angry Graf's speech, which was also appropriate in its way. No sooner was he out of hearing than Brunhilda rose quickly, and carrying her stool with her, crossed rapidly to the spinning-wheel, stepping sideways, and with her back to the wall, along the narrow margin between the wall and the trap. In a minute she drew the wheel to her, put it in position, seated herself before it, and set it in motion. All day diligently she worked, with the decision and dexterity acquired by constant practice; and when the light faded so that she could see her yarn no longer, she laid the wheel in its original place, and returned to her old position against the wall, taking with her the product of her labour. Then she wove the strands with her nimble fingers into stout cord; this she could do in the dark. Her material used, she depressed the trap, and pulling from the shaft a long cord, she tightly knotted to it the completed piece. Every day this work was repeated; always she was careful in scattering the flax

and being upon the stool when the gaoler appeared. After a time, instead of walking round the trap, she lightly leapt across it, so bold had her familiarity with danger rendered her. The flax was diminished: she had to scatter it lightly to make it appear untouched. Its decrease she regarded with anxiety; for yet the end of her cord was dry. Two such cords knotted together with steps must be made before she could attempt to escape. And to escape was her intention. At last, one night, when she drew the long, long cord up, she found the end wet, and wetter still she made it with the joyful tears she shed upon it. When we are wretched, a little makes us very happy. After that she worked quicker than ever, for hope gave her energy.

Unhappily the Graf's patience was less than that of his wife. When he put her in the cell, he calculated that the next morning she would be there no more. That very day he put a hat-band about his hat, and sent an obituary paragraph down to the local weekly. Now he wished to remove his hat-band, and

sighed for another fêté and a fifth wife: so great are the charms of novelty to some people. Every day he inquired after his wife, and he heard with sorrow that she still sat upon her stool. He was annoyed, feeling that this continued delay and disappointment would eventually impair the serenity of his temper. There never before had been such a destruction of delf and crockery in the Teufelswerk. He was perpetually hurling something at somebody. Injured vessels and injured vassals littered the place up. His ruffians became more unprepossessing than ever. Rage monopolised his bosom, and he began to fear it would become insensible to passion of a tenderer kind. And now dark thoughts entered his soul—thoughts that at first distressed his sensitive disposition, but which recurred again and again with lessening horror to him. Despite his aversion to crime, he felt that if his wife sat upon her stool much longer, he must shove her down the fatal shaft and do for her. And she did sit upon her stool much longer. So one morning he scrupulously got

out of bed on the wrong side; and thus prepared for any atrocity, he ordered the matutinal herring to be put back for five minutes, and once more presented himself before Brunhilda. To him, in his present state of mind, there was something satisfactory in finding her in the same aggravating position: it just wrought him to the pitch of fury necessary for the comfortable performance of a tragedy.

“Rise,” said he.

His tone commanded obedience, and Brunhilda rose.

“Fetch your wheel.”

Brunhilda did not move, but the Graf felt her tremble beneath his hand as he grasped her shoulder.

“Will you do my bidding?” he asked.

She neither moved nor spoke.

“Perish then!” he shouted, and with his whole force threw her from him.

Brunhilda shrieked as she fell.

“Thud!” reverberated the door.

Another shriek.

“Bang!” The door had closed over her,

and now came only muffled screams, rapidly growing fainter. Brunhilda was conscious of nothing as she hurtled through space. Instinct led her to throw her arms wildly about for some means of preservation. Something touched her face. She clutched at the air and by fortuitous accident her grasp closed upon the cord of her unfinished ladder. Still downwards she swept, the cord running swiftly through her fingers and cutting through them to the bone. Yet heedless of everything but of checking her fall, more tightly she grasped, now with both hands, the slender cord. Partially she succeeded in her endeavour. Her weight now hung upon her wrists. A knot of the burning cord was beneath her hand. She could see nothing, comprehend nothing, but that she was twirling round and round with increasing rapidity. But for a minute she hung thus; then there was a sharp snap above her. The cord had broken, and again she whirled downwards. The descent was short, when she encountered a fresh experience. She was now descending through icy water.

Water was roaring in her ears and gurgling in her throat. Frantically she flung her arms about, clutching vainly the intangible water, until presently the resistance to her arm ceased, and at the same moment she gasped the air. She had risen like a cork. Again she sank, and as the water rushed once more into her mouth she redoubled her exertions, straining her neck upwards and throwing her arms around her. She felt a smooth small rocky projection. She curved her fingers, and broke her nails upon the hard slippery surface ; but she saved her life. Her head again rose above the water, and now both hands clung to the irregular face of the cavern. Every muscle was strained in the effort to sustain her body in its present position. How rapidly thoughts ran through her mind ! How could she escape ; how much longer could she cling to this rock ; and a dozen other matters. Barely three minutes had elapsed since she had been hurled through the trap. At this moment Brunhilda heard a many-echoed voice roaring high above her.

This was followed by a whistling as of a body cutting the air, and then a plunge in the water behind her. Could it be the Graf—himself a victim to himself? The concussion agitated the water and loosened Brunhilda's slight hold; at the same moment something touched her shoulder. Was it the destroyer seeking to save himself by the destroyed? At least she would not perish in his arms. But her hands, with which she sought to repel him, met a friend instead of foe. The Graf had hurled down her spinning-wheel, to finish if necessary the work of destruction. By means of the wheel and the rock Brunhilda now supported herself, and shortly became sufficiently composed to think of something farther than her immediate condition. She drew herself along the face of the cavern, and presently her touch revealed to her a ledge of sufficient width as a resting-place for her body. She dragged herself upon it, and rested until her strength returned. The ledge extended beyond her reach, and being almost level with the water, she was able to creep along it and

yet retain her hold on the spinning-wheel. At each movement she explored with her hands the rock beneath and beside her: this alone guided her; no faintest gleam of light lessened the awfulness of her position, or assisted her in the least. Something that was not rock presently met her touch. It was loose and soft. Her fingers recoiled. Even in such peril the feminine repugnance of her senses to things strange was paramount. It might be some rotting slimy creature of the water. She stretched her hand in another direction, and touched something like a loose round stone. But what was the thread-like weed beside it? She rent the fearful stillness with a yet more fearful scream; and sprang into the water, away from the loathsome spot. That was not stone and weed, but bone and hair.

The struggles and fatigues that followed she never realised thoroughly until, exhausted, she lay concealed amongst the vines on the Rhine bank. She wept and sobbed, muffling the sound beneath her dank sodden dress, lest

it might lead to her discovery. It was evening, and within hearing the labourers were returning to their homes. Some were chatting and laughing—these cheered her; but those who trod along without speaking filled her heart with terror. Improbable as it was, she believed them to be servants of the Graf sent in her pursuit. How thankful was she when the first star twinkled down upon her through the vine-leaves; how grateful when, looking up to the horrible castle from which she had escaped, she saw the pale flame flickering in the black smoke of the beacon! Now she was safe from discovery by the villagers. Upon her hands and knees she began crawling from her place of concealment. Her poor arms trembled under her, partly from cold, but still more from the agitation of her weary heart. She essayed to walk; her legs doubled under her, and she fell with her face upon the brown earth.

Oldwife Grisel was no more. She had outlived the severity of the winter, as if simply

to prove how very tough and durable her constitution could be when it chose ; but when the sun shone warm and bright she melted quietly out of existence, like the snow. Before she went she told her son where he would find her money ; so that Rudolph now found himself in the possession of wealth, and ample provision for the future in the undivided profits of the ferry. The propriety which naturally characterised the proceedings of two such delightful young people as Dorothe and Rudolph forbade them to meet henceforth as had been their wont. In the evening following the burial of old Grisel, they had a happy hopeful conversation. The next day Rudolph found a friend to look after the ferry, and, having dressed himself in his Sunday clothes, he boldly walked to the house of his beloved, and asked to see the rich farmer Werner. He marched into the counting-house with a firm step, erect head, and a fine flush in his open face that made him look very handsome. I dare say Dorothe was watching from some coign of vantage,

and thought as I do. Hurldebrand, sitting on a high chair in a corner with a book on a stand before him, hardly noticed Rudolph. Werner, who was counting his money, gave a glance upwards and said :

“Four, five, six—take a seat, if you please ; seven, eight—I’ll attend to you directly ; nine, ten—that makes a hundred and ten score. Now, sir, what can I do for you ?”

When a straightforward man knows what he wants to say, it takes him but little time to say it. So very shortly Rudolph told how he wanted to marry Dorothe, and share his fortune with her. This piece of intelligence even roused the haughty Hurldebrand from his abstraction.

Werner asked Rudolph how much his fortune was, and Rudolph, who had come quite prepared for such a proper request, pulled out his heavy bag of silver, and emptied its contents, big and little, old and new, bright and dull, upon the farmer’s table. Hurldebrand asked Rudolph of what descent he was, and Rudolph told, with some pride in his voice,

how his forefathers had been known to the oldest memory as honest ferrymen of the Rhine. Werner had begun to count a new pile of gold, and he said, when Rudolph had replied to Hurldebrand, “Eleven, twelve—put up your money, my good young man, and—thirteen, fourteen—get this foolish notion out of your—fifteen, sixteen—head as soon as—seventeen—possible. Such a marriage is—eighteen—preposterous; so farewell, and God speed you—nineteen, twenty.”

Hurldebrand gave his nose a scornful elevation and returned to his study.

And now Rudolph was sitting on his bed in the cottage, and the young moon was looking with pitiless coldness through the window into his mournful eyes, that glittered with an unwonted tear. Sad and dejected was he. What hope was there for him in this world, when money and honest lineage, and an irreproachable and perfect love, failed to establish a claim to the maiden who loved him? All he could say had been unavailing. He had been forbidden to see or speak more to Dorothe.

Was there any one in this world so truly wretched as he ?

There was a feeble knock at the door. He rose, curious to know who could be out at this prohibited time. He opened the door, and, as if in answer to the question a moment since in his heart, there tottered up to him a woman all wan and bloodless. He drew back aghast, and she followed him into the moonlight, where her white teeth and widely-opened eyes added to her ghostly appearance. She put her hand on his ; her hand was damp and cold as death ; and her sleeve as it touched him was heavy with moisture. When at first he saw a woman's figure in the doorway he thought it was Dorothe's ; now he was undeceived, yet the features seemed familiar to him. Who was she ?

“ You do not know me,” she said. “ How should you ? I have lived long enough to grow old and ugly, but—”

“ Brunhilda ! ”

“ Hush ; for God's sake, hush ! ”

“ You were buried long since, I thought.”

"I have risen from the grave and from the dead. I am almost mad. I cannot believe I live. Have I been murdered, and is this death? O my God, give me a proof, a proof!"

Rudolph took both her hands in his and said, "Brunhilda, poor Brunhilda!"

"Oh, this is Rudolph—this his living voice—his kind voice! Oh, say again, Poor Brunhilda, poor Brunhilda, poor Brunhilda!" She sank upon the bed, in agony weeping for herself. These first words of kindness did more than all the Graf's cruelty; they almost broke her heart. Rudolph bent over her, soothing and calming her with the softness and tenderness of a woman. He bade her take her saturated clothes off, and go to bed. Then he took a wooden bowl, and assured that all was safe, crept into the orchard, and rather astonished the browsing cow by untimely drawing a supply of milk from her. He bade Brunhilda tell him when he might enter, and then, with such innocent freedom as the perfectly pure only can enjoy, he sat beside the

bed in which she lay, dressing the poor cut fingers, and feeding her with assiduous entreaty, as a mother would her sick child. He sat there until the moon ceased to shine into the room. He had bidden her try to sleep, and she lay perfectly still that he might see how docile she was ; and now she heard by his regular breathing that he slept. As she moved, her cheek touched his fingers as they lay upon her pillow ; gently she raised herself and touched them with her quivering lips, with what feelings few hearts may ever feel, happily or unhappily. Then she too slept, and he, awaking, crept to his mother's room, laying himself upon the empty bed to dream—a medley dream, in which his own and Brunhilda's unhappiness were strangely combined, and Dorothe and the wicked Schwartzenschwein played changeful parts.

I have no doubt that the astute reader will know perfectly well, without reading farther, how this is all to end. Dorothe, with her big eyes, will cry awhile, and Rudolph will forget that attachment ; whilst his pity for Brun-

hilda will change to a deeper feeling of love. Somehow or other Schwartzenschwein gets killed, and Rudolph offers his hand to Brunhilda, who, when they are married, will present him with all the late Graf's property, which is hers by law. Then they will make a bonfire of the old castle to celebrate their nuptials, and the ruins are there to this day. But if the reader does think so, and will read on to the bitter end, he will discover a convincing proof that the wisest and most intelligent of the race may, for once in his life, be mistaken.

Dorothe, it is true, had another and a new lover. For the term of mourning required by mediæval decency being expired, the Graf once more sought him a wife. Of all maidens none appeared so eligible for this purpose as Dorothe. Her own charms and her father's riches appealed at once to his heart and head ; he was moved alike by Cupid and cupidity. When quarter-day arrived he called personally upon Werner, and whilst upon the subject of rents, he took occasion to mention the lacera-

tion caused in his bosom by the fair Dorothe. The farmer, instead of treating this as a mere joke, expressed the pleasure he should feel in becoming the father-in-law of so worthy a noble as Schwartzenschwein, and then showed him the bags of gold set aside for Dorothe's portion.* Hurldebrand likewise expressed his desire to be united by marriage with such a fine old (disreputable) line as the Graf's. True, father and son believed him to be a rascal ; but then if we refused alliances simply on this ground, what on earth would become of our "blood" ? So he invited the Graf to stay to supper, and bade Dorothe adorn herself with ribbons. Dorothe was obedient ; but her bright ribbons were strangely in contrast with

* Werner's dissimilar treatment of the two suitors is a demonstration of the text, "Unto every one that hath shall be given." A curious parallel may be found in the custom of certain civic guilds in these barbarous times : they would with the utmost eagerness present a monarch with a licence for hawking, and enclose it in a golden casket, and the next minute give two months' imprisonment to a poor hawker who couldn't afford to buy one.

her sad face. That was cold, pale, and thin ; but her considerate relatives consoled themselves that it made her eyes appear larger and brighter, and more beautiful than ever. Schwartzenschwein was exceedingly pleased, and none the less so because of Dorothe's silence. He said a woman with so little to say would make an obedient wife. This compliment was regarded by the punctilious Hurldebrand as nothing less than an expression of love ; therefore, as he accompanied the Graf to the Teufelswerk path, he delicately inquired of him what his intentions were, to which Schwartzenschwein replied that he intended marriage with Dorothe, and that as early as convenient. Then Hurldebrand embraced the Graf, and they parted with mutual satisfaction.

The next day Werner asked his daughter when it would be convenient for her to marry the Graf von Schwartzenschwein. Dorothe angrily replied, “Never !”

“Then when can you *make* it convenient ?” asked Hurldebrand.

And again Dorothe answered “Never !”

Father and brother at first laughed ; afterwards they frowned. But Dorothe stirred not a muscle of her face. She who was unhesitatingly obedient in all else was as unhesitatingly disobedient in this. Nothing Werner or Hurldebrand said touched her in the least. She said she would marry no one if not Rudolph ; and asked them if they wished her to be murdered, as the previous consorts of the Graf had been. Werner and Hurldebrand both agreed that such would be an enviable fate compared with a mésalliance with a ferryman. You see *they* were not going to live with the Graf. A week passed, and Dorothe was unaltered in her decision. When the Graf came for his answer, the holy Hurldebrand told a lie, saying that Dorothe had a slight attack of the measles ; and so the Graf was put off for awhile. Meanwhile Hurldebrand arranged to go to Rudolph, and see if anything could be done with him towards furthering their object. If he would only put himself out of the way in any manner agreeable to himself, it might, by destroying

Dorothe's hopes, alter her determination. To Rudolph's culpable behaviour they attributed Dorothe's disposition to thwart the wishes of their hearts; and it seemed but just and reasonable that he in return should make a sacrifice—of himself for instance. With this view Hurldebrand one day made his way to the ferry-house; but his habit of prying in at people's windows saved him a world of trouble in this case. What he saw when he peeped through the little casement in Rudolph's cottage was quite sufficient; he returned home with joy in his heart. He told Dorothe that Rudolph was married; and when she boldly refused to believe him, he took her by the hand, and took her trembling by the well-loved path to the ferry. It was noon, and Rudolph was in his boat. Stealthily Hurldebrand led her over the soft green to the back window in the little cottage, and when he had first peeped himself, he bade Dorothe look. With her back towards them sat a graceful young woman, and she was braiding her long shining hair. Dorothe saw this, and that the hair was

fair, and that the neck beneath was white, and she said faintly to her brother, “Take me home, take me home!”

Never perhaps was a good man so elated with a sister’s misery as Hurldebrand. He kissed her affectionately when he said “Good-night,” and chuckled with his father in a quite plebeian and secular way.

Then Dorothe cared not what became of her, and she wished not to live. She should die: let it be quickly. At least before she went she would please her good father. So she said to him, “Father, when the Graf will have me, I am his.” After this Werner was as delighted as Hurldebrand, and the Graf as pleased as any one. There should be another fête, and the little chapel should be strewn with white and pink roses. Great preparations were made. Triumphal arches were set up; and the mayor, with the assistance of a dictionary and the sexton, wrote an address, complimenting the Graf on obtaining four wives more than an ordinary man attains to. The extra grandeur of these preparations was

made by the corporation, because latterly the goods and chattels of the wealthier Bergheimites had suffered greatly by the inroads of an opposition Graf's marauders, to whose incursions they desired Schwartzenschwein to put a stop.

When Rudolph heard of the approaching marriage, he was heart-broken. Whilst Dorothe lived and loved him, life was sweet; but now she was false and loved him not, death were less bitter. Brunhilda saw his grief, and her good heart bled for him. She suggested that Dorothe was acting under compulsion and not from choice; and she bade him seek her and assure himself she was yet true. Not for one minute did Brunhilda entertain the unworthy thought that she might gain Rudolph by Dorothe's marriage with the Graf. She loved him too deeply, too well for that.

Rudolph shook his head sadly; and hopelessly went to Werner's house and asked to see Dorothe. But Werner and Hurldebrand thrust him from the door, and said Dorothe had freely given herself to the Graf and scorned

the ferryman. Finally they sneeringly bade him go back and be content with his leman. Never had Rudolph felt so bitterly enraged. Her that he had called sister they had called by an opprobrious name ; they had been spying into his affairs, and wilfully misjudged his humanity. Not one word of this did he tell Brunhilda ; she suffered enough. But in his sleep he spoke wildly and loud through the night ; whilst Brunhilda, hearing his cries, knelt by her bed praying and weeping.

The Graf descended from the castle full an hour before the ceremony was to take place. The interim he employed in receiving the address and promising redress. The Bergheimites should be avenged on the unprincipled marauders. He also inspected the floral arrangements, and tasted the wine supplied by Werner for general use. Then he went into the chapel, and whilst drawing on his new gauntlets made casual inquiries of the sexton as to the whereabouts of the church plate.

Knowledge is always useful. The Graf was not above robbing a church.

The villagers lined either side of the road through the market-place, and looked eagerly for the appearance of Werner and the bridal party. Presently there was a murmur, and the procession appeared. First came the whole police force of the two villages to clear the way; and as there were no obstacles in their path, they performed their duty to universal admiration. Then came Werner's vine-dressers in an unique livery, invented by Hurldebrand especially for this occasion, and very fine they looked—especially those who happened to fit their clothes. Hurldebrand had to have the costumes made in Köln, and as all were made precisely of one size, it was rather awkward for the little men; they had a difficulty in keeping the peaks of their heavy helmets above their nose. And it was also slightly uncomfortable for the big men; they were obliged to take mincing steps, like a girl's, a certain fear attending their every movement. Then came Hurldebrand in the armour his grandfather had fought in against the Saracens, and he inspired terror in every heart; for some were awed by his

terrific appearance, and others feared his weight would break his horse's back in the middle. So he staggered by. Then came Werner with everything upon him new, including a black patch on his nose. The barber who shaved him was so impressed with the necessity of being careful, that he could not keep his hand steady for nervousness, and the razor, slipping into the soft part of the farmer's nose, had caused an extensive and gaping wound: hence the plaster. Supporting herself upon his arm was the bride. They were followed by her friends, and the procession was closed by Werner's dairymaids and female servants, who, like the men, had been attired by Hurldebrand in appropriate dress. They did not look so uncomfortable as the men, because it was easy enough to leave hooks undone here, and to stick pins in there; and besides they were very well known to every one in the village, and a good deal of good-humoured pleasantry and fun took place between them and their friends. Especially the little boys took pleasure in treading upon their long skirts,

and in pinning tags and bobs to the hanging fallals of their head-dresses.

As if in a stupor the bride walked along. Her eyes were not cast down, but looked straight before her into vacuity. Her features were quite expressionless. It was as if her soul were already dead, and her body but the fair nest from which the sweet bird had flown.

She had reached the market-place, when from the crowd one stepped forward, and running to her side, caught up her listless hand and said :

“Dorothe, Dorothe !”

Our hearts require little of our tongues. In repeating that name, unhappy Rudolph expressed what hours of explanation could not have told. Bitter grief and faithful love, entreaty and despair, were in an instant told, and as quickly heard and believed. Now a flush came into Dorothe’s face, her eyes fixed themselves upon Rudolph as if they would never leave him, and she flung her arms about his neck, knowing nothing but that he was still hers.

Werner was amazed and confounded. What could he do? Not knowing, he hastened after Hurldebrand, who, concerned with his own difficulties, was getting along as fast as he could with his part of the procession, and leaving the latter part of the cavalcade behind.

You may be sure the episode of the lovers' meeting attracted all attention. Whispers, murmurs, sympathetic sighs arose from those near, and were echoed by those beyond. The villagers closed round the young couple, and through this mob it was no easy matter to break. Hurldebrand's horse had been stopped, and when urged to proceed again, had quietly doubled his legs and rolled over on his rider; and Werner was disrespectfully handled by the independent villagers when he attempted to get before them. At this juncture the Graf's harsh voice was heard, and quickly an opening was made for him. He strode through with his hand upon his sword, and Werner followed at his heels like a hound. The mob closed in and pressed round upon them. Schwartzen-

schwein drew his sword, and quickly the villagers fell back, leaving an open space around the principal actors in the scene.

“Sunder them ! Sunder them !” shouted Werner.

The Graf put his hand upon Dorothe’s shoulder, and said to Rudolph :

“Ferryman, this woman is my wife.”

“She is not thine, nor shall she be,” said Rudolph, disengaging his sword arm from about Dorothe’s waist.

“She and her father too have given their promise. Who will separate us ? Who has the right to come between us ?”

“I,” said a voice beside.

Then Brunhilda, removing a veil that had concealed her face from those she stood amongst, looked boldly in the eyes of the wicked Graf, and turned around that all people might see her. Then she said loudly, that they might every one hear her, “I am Brunhilda, the wife of Graf von Schwartzenschwein, and I forbid this marriage.”

The Graf appeared unable to believe his

senses. His face became ashen, and the peonies that erst blossomed in his cheeks were distilled, and the drops of moisture stood upon his face. A hostile murmur amongst the villagers aroused him to the necessity of immediate and decisive action. He drew a whistle from his breast and blew a shrill note. Half-a-dozen quasi-villagers threw off their cloaks and appeared in their true characters—Schwartzenschwein's body-guard, armed to the teeth. The Graf and his men faced the crowd and drew their swords.

“Now,” said the Graf, “let us arbitrate. Resistance is useless. Surrender to me Dorothe; she shall be mine. As for thee, woman” (facing Brunhilda), “thou art an unprincipled impostor, and must suffer the punishment of imposition. Guards, seize her !”

“Hold !” cried Rudolph. “Thou art known. Suspecting who the real marauders were, we have watched, and found in thee and thy scoundrels the destroyers of our property. We are prepared !” He clapped his hands, and a score of sturdy villagers, turning up their

sleeves, displayed at once their badge of special constable, and the lethal weapon wielded by the force. Rudolph himself drew his sword, and placing himself between Dorothe and Brunhilda and the Graf, he shouted :

“ Bergheim, secure the rascals, and for yourself freedom from the cursed yoke of Schwartzenschwein.” Unused to armed opposition, the Graf’s men no sooner saw the formidable array of their adversaries than they threw themselves upon their knees and begged for mercy. Not so the Graf. Whirling his sword about his head he sprang towards Rudolph, and brought his weapon down with the utmost velocity. It is needless to say Rudolph excused himself from being cleft to the chine by a very dexterous parry. And then began a fearful fight. Every stroke seemed to carry certain destruction with it, yet failed in effect. Not once did either seek the customary interval for refreshment. Blood flowed on both sides, and blood flew between. Men feared to interpose. Women were too interested to faint. All prayed for the success of Rudolph. Even Werner

said, “Conquer, Rudolph, and thy guerdon shall be Dorothe ;” and Hurldebrand said, “Thy prowess (if thou winnest) will prove thy nobility, and thy worth even for my sister.” What other encouragement needed Rudolph ? Yet a greater incentive had he in the spectacle of these two poor women, who loved him so dearly, clinging to each other, in terror for his rather than of their own fate. He was not fighting for himself alone, but also for them ; and this it was that made him superior to his foe. At last Rudolph made a desperate lunge and his sword was through the Graf’s body. The Graf’s parry came too late. Yet the stroke cut Rudolph’s sword off by the hilt. The Graf, though mortally wounded, was not yet dead. With agony and hate transforming his face to that of a fiend, he nerved himself for the thrust which should be his last. Rudolph saw it. He cast one tender look of despair, immortal love, and adieu at Dorothe, and dropped his arms beside him to receive his death. And now Schwartzenschwein’s sword in its turn was sheathed in quivering flesh, and the Graf and

his victim fell together. Yet Rudolph was unscathed !

Brunhilda had seen his despair, and thrown herself upon the threatening steel, and now, but a foot removed from the Graf's corse, she lay bleeding on the stones. Rudolph flung himself beside her, and by him sank Dorothe.

Brunhilda saw no one but him for whom she died. She could not speak, but her expanded eyes were full of unutterable love and entreaty as Rudolph looked down into them. And she pursed her lips, like an erring child wishing a kiss before sinking to sleep. He bent his head, and for the first time their lips met, and the sound of a kiss broke the awful silence. Then she closed her eyes with the saddest, sweetest smile, and a little shuddering sigh told how all grief left her heart, and that at last the weary child slumbered.



Ag.



UG.

BEFORE Britannia ruled the waves Britons were slaves more frequently than not. The feudal lords kept them to fill vile offices; so they were little better off than the clerk of modern days. Their subjugation did not improve them, and a general heaviness was the characteristic of the ordinary Briton. Ug was an ordinary Briton—very ordinary; and though he is the hero of this story, it cannot be said of his features that any one was finely turned, except indeed his nose, and that *was* finely turned—up. His hair was black and

matted ; Nature had given him a great shock, and it consequently fell in disorder about his shoulders and down his back.*

This natural fell, or rather fall, permitted only the lower part of his face to be seen, and that, as has been hinted, was not much to look at ; but the rest of his person, from its magnitude, was as much as the eye could conveniently take in at one time. From heel to head he measured eight spans of a thief's hand, and it took four wolves' skins to cover him according to the statute bathing regulations of Alfred (lib. i. cap. &c. 3 yds.). He could shake a man to death ; and for this and other such qualities Surgard the Dane, whose villein he was, instead of relegating him to the scullery, kept him to scour the woods, to protect the deer from wolf and poacher, and keep the game alive generally. Deep in the forest lived he,

* "He hadde hys hayre on hys backe instedde
Of hys cheste, where ye locks ought to goe.
[Syngynge] Up wyth ye shouyl," etc.

but judging by his simple exterior, few would have imagined how deep. He had built his hut in a part almost inaccessible. Broken ground and impenetrable barriers of brambles and thick undergrowth hedged it round and about in every direction. Within these barriers was a wood of closely planted firs, whose dense crests interwove in a pall, beneath which all was black and noiseless as death. There no birds sang, and save lichens and fungi nothing grew. In his hut by day and in ranging the solitary forest-paths by night he lived in perpetual gloom. So Surgard believed, and was content. But not twenty paces from his hut lay a circular space a hundred yards in diameter, softly carpeted with yielding sward and sweet thyme, and it lay open to the blue heavens. In the centre stood a colossal oak; dead. Hundreds of years before, the Druids had worshipped beneath its spreading arms, and they said it was as old as the island. It was thought that Ug still held the ancient faith of his race, and lived here to be near his sacred oak. Certain it was he guarded it with

more than a beadle's tenderness. He trained sweet honeysuckles about its enormous bole ; he plucked ungainly weeds from the space about it, and rooted out the aggressive offspring of the pines as soon as they appeared above ground. Such food as singing birds are fond of he laid amongst the honeysuckle ; so in the morning and evening thrushes and blackbirds and many another sweet songster sang, and the sun shone down on the spot the livelong day. Ug slept with his face turned towards the oak, and his hand on his knife ; and very little doubt is there about the fate that awaited the enterprising stranger who should break into this sanctuary. But intellectual curiosity being then at a discount, no old gentlemen or young ladies sought to work their way through the before-mentioned obstacles ; and it was fortunate for them that they were not afflicted with the penetrating faculties of modern times. Surgard had once visited the place, and Ug had been his guide ; and he led him thither by the long way, which was through the brambles, and he led him thence by the short cut, which

was through the air and from the top of a cliff to its bottom. Then Surgard, though not comfortable, was satisfied, and he desired to go thither and thence no more. There was but one who found his way to the hut more than once, and Osric the son of Surgard was he. Ug had loved the lad from his infancy, although apparently with little reason; for Surgard, who delighted in the degradation of others, had cruelly set the huge Briton to perform a nurse-maid's duties. He had been called up at night to hush the shrieking morsel, to light fires and warm the semolina; and as perambulators were not then invented, he had been sent to carry the child whilst still in long clothes up and down the terrace, to the derisive merriment of the lazy Saxon lackeys.* But Ug,

* How he revenged himself on these rascals is quaintly told in the old chronicle before referred to :

"I gesse he wolde those scurvie Jakes have
myghtie roughlie handled,
Hadde not that sely kyd for toe be delicate lie
dandled :

instead of hating the child, attended to its wants with tender care and solicitude, putting him in the way of becoming a healthy member of society, instead of putting him out of the way, as a less humane nurse would have done. His care was required still more when Surgard's wife, in obedience to the desires of her lord, died of a compound fracture. The time came for short-coating the little man, and Surgard commissioned Ug to find him an inexpensive suit. Remembering his own early costume, Ug sought the materials in the wood, and set

Nowe thoughhe hys hondes he myght not use, hys
foot he colde, and soe
He goeth to one scurvie Jake and kyckes hym with
hys toe.
But where he kycked hym none yknew, though hym
they dyd yseke,
Until at laste they founde hym in ye myddle of
nexte weke,
Whan moche ye marvel was as Ug hys kycke
hym dyd not kylle,
Nathless I wot ihat leveller dyd make ye valet
hill."

about making the short clothes as short as possible. He got some woad and resinous gum, and painted a little tail-coat of blue upon Osric's little body, and in his coat of paint, with a rabbit-skin for continuation, presented him to his father with joy and much pride. Later Ug taught him all he knew, and by his own example inspired the lad with courage and honesty and pity and gentleness. Some sort of pagan worship, too, he taught him, and Osric thought implicitly with Ug, until a monk taught him to know better, or worse. But the impressions he had received were never entirely effaced. Even when he was thinking of having his head shaved and wearing grey-peas in his shoes, a reverent emotion filled him as he stood before the great oak with Ug; and he seemed to hear again the spirit voices singing within it as he had heard them at a time when he was capable of believing anything.

Surgard was seated in his chair, swearing in very low Saxon at his trembling serfs who had set him there. He was a fine old Saxon,

burly and red, with a fiery nose and a watery eye. He had lived not wisely but too well, laughing and quaffing and feeding in a manner rather suited to the old times than an old digestion, and now he had the fine old gout, and every indication of a noble old apoplexy coming upon him. For the last twenty years he had been carried to bed regularly at night, and from his jollity it seemed that he preferred that process to any other ; but latterly he had also to be carried out of it in the morning, and from his improper language on these occasions apparently it was less pleasant.

“ Where’s the cold baron ? ” roared Surgard, striking the breakfast-table with the handle of his knife, when he had exhausted his low Saxon.

“ The cold baron is all gone ; but there’s a cold friar outside,” said the jester, a miserable fool, who ventured this sorry clench to divert his lord and his lord’s anger from himself.

Joy beamed amongst the fat wrinkles in urgard’s face, and for once he refrained from

flinging something at the jester's head, his usual manner of repaying the poor fellow's efforts to please. He ordered the friar to be brought in at once with the trouts, and in savage joy he plunged his fangs into a knuckle of ham. Breakfast was a dull meal with Surgard, who ate not because he was hungry, but simply because it was less trying to the jaws than perpetual yawning. At that period no morning paper lay upon the breakfast-table to cultivate and improve the taste with special reports of murders, petty larcenies, births, deaths, marriages, and other fearful calamities; and no early post brought begging letters and bills. Occasionally a succedaneum, as in the present instance, was provided for him by Ug. Ug, as Surgard's ranger, had authority to execute the provisions of the game laws—which then were not much better than they now are—and execute also any one offending against those laws. At the rare intervals when he did slay an offender, it was his custom to carry the body to the hall and cast it upon the threshold. Surgard asked with the greatest

regularity if there were any corpses this morning, exactly as we should inquire after letters, and he farther increased the parallel by drawing conclusions from the external appearance of the body as to its internal nature.

With the trouts came the holy defunct. Then the unhappy jester made a bold stroke, and suggested that the fish should be removed.

“Do nothing of the kind,” said Surgard, laying violent hands on the dish, and turning one eye fondly on the trouts whilst the other was turned fiercely on the jester.

“Sire, pardon me,” said the jester. “I thought you would prefer one *course* at a time.”

Surgard threw another angry look at the poor creature, and accompanied it with a black-jack. When he had recovered his equanimity he said, “This, if I may judge by the length of his petticoat, is a priest; and this,” he continued, resting his foot on the body’s chest, “if I may judge by its size, is an abbot’s. Ah, me! since the times of my honest old

grandfather,* these varlets have had everything their own way—except my venison, and hem me! they sha'n't have that. I see nothing but ruin for poor old England now there's a prince heir to the throne who knows his letters." † His philosophical reflections were cut short by the appearance on the table of a smoking pasty, and to that he immediately devoted his entire attention. It was a delicious preparation, and the aroma pervading the hall deeply affected the hungry dependants. But far more wonderful was its influence upon the abbot. Slowly that holy man raised his hand, and laying it upon that part of his body which contained his digestive apparatus—it is necessary to be carefully delicate nowadays—solemnly he rubbed it, then audibly he smacked his lips. Surgard had disposed of the meat and the gravy, and was now beginning upon the crust, when these sounds caught his ear. He

* If the very apocryphal genealogical tree could be trusted, the old gentleman was no better than his grandson.

† Alfred at this time was at a grammar school.

turned hastily, and looking downwards met the glassy eye of the abbot. The abbot winked and again smacked his lips. The belief in spiritualism was almost as great in that unenlightened age as at present, so that Surgard's hasty impression that these manifestations were due to diabolic agency must not be imputed to ignorance on his part. He was naturally very frightened, and notwithstanding his gout, disposed himself with great celerity in a place of safety, and alternately shrieked for mercy and called upon his serfs to throttle the abbot. That unfortunate man had for a moment imagined himself in his refectory, awakening from an unpleasant dream ; but how mistaken such an idea was he quickly realized by finding six or seven heavy vassals sitting upon him. He added his shrieks to those of Surgard, but a wretch stopped his part in the duet by grasping his windpipe. At this juncture there strode into the hall a youth with long golden hair that rippled over his shoulders, a yellow beard that flowed down his breast, an aquiline nose, blue eyes, pink cheeks, coral lips, white

teeth, and every other requisite of a hero who *might* have been a study for Rembrandt, Michael Angelo, Correggio, etc. He cried “Hold!” whereupon the rascal in charge of the abbot’s gullet tightened his grasp; for all loved this youth and obeyed his commands. The abbot kicked convulsively, barking Surgard’s tenderest shin, and his face became iridescent, exhibiting in one moment the several colours of a very bright rainbow. The youth observed that his word was misconceived, and followed it up by another observation addressed to the rascal. “Unhand your prostrate captive,” he said. Then the rascal relaxed his hold, and the abbot felt more comfortable. Osric—for the youth was he—requested the abbot to explain the state of affairs; and this he at once commenced to do, with many prefatory protestations of innocence. Surgard would have put an end to these protestations and the abbot at one and the same time; but Osric insisted upon the poor man having a fair hearing, and a horn of water to clear his throat withal. The abbot then declared that

he had not received his wound from Ug the ranger ; and to prove that what he said was the truth and no lie, he demanded that he and the ranger might be brought face to face. “ So shall it be,” said Surgard ; “ and if their accounts disagree, we’ll have the ropes up, and they shall fight it out in the hall before me.” This was the method of settling disagreements in those ancient times. The abbot smiled with the consciousness of innocence, and Surgard frowned with the consciousness that he should lose his sport if the abbot were innocent. Osric, whose humanity exceeded his selfishness, put back in his study with a sigh the current number of Alfred’s serial (‘ *De Gustibus non Disputandum* ; or the inexplicable Lichens botanically considered ’), which had been his study that morning, and then walked off to the wood for Ug. When he was out of sight, Surgard, who now feared he might lose the abbot, thus addressed his prisoner :

“ Abbot, thou canst not deny that thou hast had a fair hearing ”—the abbot bowed low—

“and we have listened to thy prayer for mercy.”

Then the abbot replied meekly :

“Full well I know it, sire. Tell me how I can repay thee for thy goodness.”

“I will,” returned Surgard. “Prepare as quickly as you can and as quietly as possible for death.”

“Death!” echoed the abbot incredulously.

“Ay, death, abbot,” Surgard said ; and then with some bitterness continued : “I grieve to see this want of gratitude in thee. This hesitation ill becomes the recipient of so much grace. Weeks and weeks have I spent in solitary anguish, unalleviated by one single delight ; and now at this moment, when thou hast the power to afford me five minutes’ amusement, thou—grudging niggard that thou art—thou fain wouldest bilk me. Oh, this is gruesome !” A cloud appeared to traverse his brow ; then addressing a vassal rather in sorrow than in anger, he said, “Bring hither the brands and the hooks ; we must hamstring him and put his eyes out—first.”

Whilst the minions were carefully collecting these simple yet ingenious contrivances of the age, the abbot implored the assistance of his patron saint; but when the brands were heated red, and miraculous intervention appeared less probable than the loss of his eyesight, he dismissed the saint from his thoughts with a hearty curse, and set his wits to work to supply spiritual deficiency. Presently he said,

“Saxon, my heart is charged with pity for thy loneliness, and I grieve to think I may soon cease to be able to offer thee a solace and a comfort, and that which should relieve thee of half thy pains.”

Surgard had been more than once the victim of charlatans and quack leeches, and this was why he placed his finger beside his nose and replied to the abbot with a knowing wink,

“No, you don’t Old-Parr me.”

“I prate not of boluses,” returned the abbot, with an accent of scorn. “I allude to a lovely maiden who might nurse thee in thine

infirmity. Thy wife could not object to thy adopting her as a daughter."

"I have no wife," said Surgard cheerfully.

"So much the better," responded the abbot, and added to himself, "for her." Then continued aloud, "There will be no matrimonial diversity of opinion upon the matter."

"How old may this maiden be?"

"Three score and ten."

"What! I'll teach thee to put thy scurvy jests upon me. Clap the irons—"

"I said," interrupted the abbot, "three score and ten; and so she may be if she's spared. At present she is sixteen—and a study for Rubens."

"Rubens be smothered! Who is she, and where does she live? Out with it, and don't let the irons get too cold, there's a good fellow!"

"She hath a voice like to a bird."

"Who is she? I have hunted the country round, yet know I of no such beauty."

"She hath eyes like a fawn's, and she is as supple and like—"

“Where is she?”

“Her cheek is soft and as white as curds of new milk.”

Thus, by artful evasions and adroit wiles, did the sagacious abbot succeed in averting the execution of Surgard’s barbarous sentence. Ingeniously he excited the Saxon’s curiosity, and skilfully he maintained the interest, until the arrival of Osric with Ug allowed him to relax his exertions. When Ug beheld the abbot, a keen observer might have seen him give a start of surprise; but as the keen observer was not born until the time of G. P. R. James, this queer start of Ug’s was unnoticed. Being questioned by Osric, he affirmed the abbot’s assertions, and declared that never before had he set eyes or hands on him. Then the abbot told how that, whilst meditating in the wood, he had been led to stray from the path by hearing of sweet sounds; and how he saw a hooded monk wandering along with a staff in one hand, but, which was worse, a maiden’s hand in the other. The maiden was exceeding lovely, and

sang so ravishingly that the nightingales were silent, learning how to sing; and he told how he stepped forward to upbraid the monk, and take the maiden to the lady abbotess; and how the monk had struck him down, and the maiden and everything vanished from his sight, and he knew of nothing until the fragrance of the venison partly revived him.

Surgard commanded Ug to seek and to find the monk and the maiden, and to bring them before him. And Ug returned to the woods. Pending the discovery the abbot was confined to the dampest cellar in the establishment, on a diet of lentils and water. Thus Surgard made him fast in two ways, as the jester said. With piteous groans, fat toads, and an unseen swarm of many-legged crawling things the abbot passed a miserable existence, until once more he was brought before Surgard. Ug was standing aloof, with knitted brows in addition to his customary skins.

“Wretch,” said Surgard, addressing the abbot; “thy tale is false. Art thou prepared for death?”

The abbot was not prepared for death, but he was for this, and thus he replied : “ Sire, who says I’m false himself is false to thee. Trust not the tale of yon hulking caitiff: poltroon is written in his face.”

Surgard inspected his face with some curiosity, and for the first time wished he knew his letters.

“ Yon ranger, fearing for his own safety, hath avoided rather than sought the dread monk.”

Ug would have proved his courage upon the spot; but Surgard, having a plan in which the abbot’s existence was concerned, forbade the ranger to tear him to pieces, and with a malicious smile he said to the abbot, “ Since thou hast reason to suspect Ug of cowardice, thou thyself shalt accompany him this night, lead him to where the monk appeared, and if he evades the contest, bring him back to me dead or alive.”

The fat abbot quaked like a blancmange, and implored to be excused from such a fearful commission, but Surgard was inexorable.

That night Ug and the abbot went away together. The next day Ug returned alone. He said that the abbot had given him the slip. Surgard was furious, and censured Ug for his want of care and neglect ; but this accusation was unjust, for Ug had buried the abbot with considerable carefulness. Surgard was dejected and unhappy, for in view of the abbot's return he had arranged a variety of interesting if painful experiments to be practised upon the abbot's body.

Osric's studious disposition caused him to delight in abstruse mathematical problems and arithmetical calculations. He was therefore admirably fitted for putting two and two together. The abbot's story, and his subsequent disappearance, led him at first to suspect Ug's veracity ; and afterwards to ramble by moonlight in search of the mysterious monk and his fair companion. This was clear to him :— either the abbot was false, or Ug knew of the monk's existence. Visions of the unknown beauty were ever before him, interfering considerably with his digestion and his study

of the *De Gustibus*; so that, though the author was Alfred, his meaning was not half understood.* His was a particularly susceptible time of life. His knowledge of young women was obtained from the songs of peripatetic bards; but of course no very definite idea could be got from their wandering descriptions. Surgard had been so outrageous a marauder, and so unscrupulous a neighbour, that all the respectable families had removed, or been removed, from that part of Mercia in which he settled. It was with an educational view therefore that Osric strode into the woods in search of the maiden; and perhaps it was his inquisitive mood that occasioned the curious sensations he felt in thinking of her.

It was the age of “old-fashioned summers.” Clouds obscured the moon only on convenient occasions, and were never absent when re-

* “Nowe lysten friendys to my merrie clenche !
This Osric colde for thyngynge on this wenche
Get nothing of hys bookes intoe hys hedde,
Nathless ye auctor of hem was halfredde.”

quired. Trees and plants were sustained by never-failing dew, which fell imperceptibly, and occasioned no rheumatics. The earth, thus not having to yield dew as at present, did not require moisture from above ; and if it did rain, the showers were gentle, and fell when nobody was about. The sun at that time rose in the morning, and set at night ; so that the earth not being necessitated to revolve as now, the disastrous effects of revolution were not felt in a meteorology turned entirely upside down.

Therefore, as Osric wended along his way, the moon stood in the blue heavens in unveiled loveliness, like Venus emerged from the sea. Over soft moss, smooth sward, and crisp heaths he trod, ever and again listening for the longed-for sound of sweet music. Sometimes he stood in the white moonlight, and sometimes in the chequered shade beneath the shining-leaved beech. Everywhere was stillness and silence. When he moved, his foot-step scared the brooding thrush that flew across his path with sharp startled cry ; or the night-

feeding rabbit scurried away to its burrow. Once a tinkling sound caught his ear, and he rushed forwards, to find his hopes dashed even by the loveliness of a trickling brook. Hour after hour he spent wandering, waiting ; still listening in the woods. Now he was come to a break in the forest, and between him and the open space stood a patch of tall fox-gloves. The moon was sinking over the wood behind him. In the heavens he faced, a few orange streaks in the paler blue told of the sun's recoming. Still silent were the sylvan songsters. Osric leant against a tree in the deep shadow, to hear their joyful awakening. Hark ! was that a distant lark ? No ; never sang lark with that continued sweetness. Nearer, sweeter, clearer, more ravishing became the song ; and Osric's hand, folded against his breast, felt his heart beating beneath it. The moon shone fully on the wood opposite. Presently there issued thence the dark figure of a hooded monk ; and clinging to his side a slim figure, clad all in white. Nearer and nearer they came, sweeter and sweeter grew the song. Osric gazed only

at the fair incarnation of his dream, as she approached him. Still nearer and nearer they came, till he could have thrown himself at her feet, as she passed still singing towards an alley in the wood. He could see the sweet lips parted in that rapturous song, and the small teeth within them ; he could see the great lovely eyes looking upwards to the heaven they mirrored ; he could see what of her neck the envious golden tresses left unpressed. He could see her graceful breast rising beneath the melody it held ; and then she was gone. But long, long the song lingered, growing fainter and fainter, till it died. Whilst he listened, he was conscious of nothing else ; but that gone, he found tears of exquisite emotion rolling down his cheeks ; and believed what he had seen to be a vision, because he had not the power to follow it. Now had the orange streaks become pink ; and from many a bush and branch loud sang the wakened birds. Ah ! she, that dearest creation he had seen, was the goddess who awakens the birds : the wood nymph, the fairy, the spirit-angel he had

read of ; and here at her bidding the sun rose, and birds sweetly sang to her glory.

After that for many nights Osric wandered in the woods ; yet found nothing to prove he had not dreamed. Almost he convinced himself that too much *De Gustibus* had disordered his brain, and that the singing night-wanderer was a phantom of his imagination.

One night, as he was resting on a fallen trunk, a murmur as of distant song reached him. He sprang up and ran to the spot whence the notes appeared to come ; and staying occasionally, he heard the sound increase, until the same sweet song he had before heard came in rich fulness upon him. It seemed as if a few steps more would bring him within sight of the lovely nymph. Carefully now he stepped forwards, lest his footfall might disturb her, and break off her melody. But now at each step the notes grew fainter and fainter still. Then he leapt recklessly onwards for a dozen yards. When he paused, he heard as afar off a faint tinkling mocking laugh ; and the birds

awoke, and he alone amongst them stood in despair and sorrow. He did not, as young men in more civilised times do, seek to forget his troubles by a systematic course of study or drink. He indulged himself in perpetual thought of the lovely unknown; wandering by night, and lying on his bed in restless cogitation by day.* A third time he heard the voice, and this time he saw the maiden. She stood within an arm's length of him, and she was holding a tiny campanula between her eyes and the moon, better to see its delicate outline. The moonlight in her eyes sparkled as in dewdrops. She was alone, and saw him not until he threw himself upon his knees at

* “**O**n manne in dole hys sorroes multipliess,
Ande syts in ashes and sacke-clothe lykwise;
Another manne cares nothinge for his backe,
But bloweth out hys baggys with ye sacke;
By chockpennie ande other ryksome plaie
To lose hire dol'ors other wyghts essaie,
And of thys kydnie Osric was : he laie
Pytchyng and tossyng on his bedde alle daie.”

Chronicle of Ug.

her feet, clasping his hands in silent devotion.

She did not vanish, but proved her mortality by screaming ; but before Osric could assure her of the honourable character of his intentions, he felt himself raised in the air and thrown on one side. As he rose to his feet, he saw the hooded monk standing between him and the maiden. The monk turned his back on Osric, and took the little maid in his arms, and there she nestled. Now Osric felt another emotion ; and jealousy and hatred towards the monk filled him with rage. He drew his sword, and called upon the monk to defend himself ; the monk faced him, and a shining knife was in his hand. Was it to save Osric or the monk that the maiden sprang between them, fearlessly turning her breast to the monk's knife ? Osric hoped and feared equally ; but he lowered the point of his sword and bowed his head. Had the monk's knife been at his throat, he could not have moved then. The monk took the girl by the hand, and spoke softly to her ; obedient she moved away

into the forest shade, but to the last her lovely eyes rested on the entranced Osric.

Gone, gone, gone for ever ! The thought flashed through Osric's mind, and its dreadfulness dismayed him. He threw his sword away and sped after her ; but scarce two paces had he gone, when a grip was on his arm, and the monk led him back, picked up his sword, and handing it to him, spoke thus : " Thou art young, live ; thou art brave, take thy sword. If thou art good, seek her that is gone never again ; if thou art kind, leave me in peace. Go."

" Who has given thee a right to such a treasure as she ? She is too young and too beautiful for thee and night. I will find her, and raise her to all the glories thou keepest her from. And thou shalt fall to deeper shades than these. Get thee a sword and protect thyself ! "

The monk laughed derisively, and said, " Do thy best and worst, poor lad."

Then they fought ; but the monk used his knife only in defence against Osric's sword,

and when Osric's rash play brought his body in contact with the knife's point, his foe drew back, and the blade remained bright. But slowly the monk retreated towards the deeper shadow behind him; and upon him closely pressed Osric, vainly seeking to disable him. At last, when they were beneath the dark shade, Osric believed his blade smote the head of his antagonist, who at that very instant entirely disappeared, and a voice, that seemed to proceed from the very bowels of the earth, cried warningly, "Step no farther!"

The singular manner in which the monk had fought, his sudden disappearance, together with the voice from the earth, combined to convince Osric of the supernatural character of these wood wanderers, and for a moment he obeyed the warning injunction, and stood trembling and stationary. Then the thought of her he had lost and his rival banished all else from his mind, and he sprang to the spot where the monk had stood. Headlong he fell through the deceptive growth which masked the precipice, and very surely would he have broken

his neck, but for an outstretched tree-bough that, breaking his fall and a rib, slid him gently into a yielding bed of brambles. Whilst he extricated himself from this position, he had ample time to undeceive himself of any belief that lingered with respect to the visionary nature of the transactions, and to find an explanation of the subterranean voice. Yet why the monk should be so carefully merciful remained an insoluble mystery. When morning came, and things were still more discernible, he found blood upon his tunic, yet no wound upon his body. But that mystery was also unravelled. For upon unfastening the girdle that bound his tunic (preparatory to throwing himself upon his bed), something fell from it upon the ground ; he stooped, and picked up—an ear. Clapping his hands to his head, he found he had still his proper adornment ; so he was satisfied—very satisfied—that the ear was not his, and equally that his last blow had taken effect upon the monk. Here also was a convincing proof of the reality of what he had seen ; and this proof, for which

he had been so long waiting, determined him upon making Ug assist him in his farther search. That very morning he went to Ug's hut. The ranger was absent, and Osric laid a fir cocoon upon the ground in the place where he slept, for this was the customary signal when Ug was wanted at the hall. No notice was taken of the signal, so Osric again went to the hut. The cocoon was moved, but Ug was absent. This time Osric piled up a heap of cocoons, that the signal might not escape notice.

That day, whilst Surgard with Osric and the vassals were dining, the hangings against the door were pushed aside, and the burly ranger stood within the hall.

“Who wants Ug?” he asked.

Osric rose, and beckoning to the ranger, withdrew into the recess of a window. Surgard took no notice of this arrangement; for frequently Osric would have Ug to the hall and talk privily with him. A strong friendship existed between them. Osric was still a very young man; and very young men then were

very much as very young men now are. He was very well satisfied with himself. He had attained to the first resting-bough up the tree of knowledge, and desired all humanity to swarm up after him, no matter how unfitted for climbing some amongst them might be, or how much happier they would be to sit on the safe soil of comfortable ignorance. Herein is the Christian superior to the Pagan. He had tried to teach Ug the multiplication table and decency in small clothes. He had also read to him several poems of his own composition. These latter Ug had listened to eagerly, and with infinite patience and perseverance had learned them. With each acquisition his love increased, and but for the multiplication and small clothes (with either of which he would have nothing to do), he would have had entire confidence in Osric, and worshipped him as one all good. True, Osric lately had been less persistent in harping upon the objectionable strings; for the ranger's attention to the poetry was very flattering to the composer, and in that age, barbarous as it was, men

generally did that which was most remunerative to their interest or vanity. Still he felt it his duty occasionally to refer to the more strictly educational subject, and he did so, very much to Ug's discomfort. He learnt from Osric's instruction only this: Osric knew more than it became man to know; therefore, he was not to be trusted wholly. Perhaps it was this that made him approach Osric uneasily. He nervously tried to parry the subject.

"Tell me more tales of maids and men," he said. "Or wouldst thou rather that I tell thee of the wood creatures that run and crawl and fly, and of their habits?"

"Tell me," said Osric, "of the hooded monk and the fair maid who wander in our woods."

Just then, Surgard, who thought that rather than to die of ennui, it would be better to listen to what Osric and the ranger were talking about, crept behind them, menacing his vassals to silence with an expressive flourish of his carving knife.

"I know not of this monk. Have I not said so before?" said Ug.

“Thou knowest every part of the forest. All and every night thou wanderest through its depths. Nothing occurs there of which thou knowest not. No sound is there that is strange to thee, yet the sweet song of a fair maid and the presence of a monk—”

“There is no monk !”

“There is. I have seen him. Last night I fought him. Look at this ear ; it is his.”

Surgard pricked up his ears ; then he pricked up his vassels with his carver, and made them silently gather round. He carefully scrutinised Ug’s black locks.*

“I have been asleep. I will awake and find this monk, if he is to be found,” said Ug.
“And now tell me of twice two and buskins.”

Osric took no notice of this diversion, but said, “Ug, for the first time thou art lying to me. I see that thou knowest of this monk.”

* Modern burlesquists will recognise in the following their most favoured joke :

“*Mis lockys Surgarde looked at wyth yeare,
Regardinge first thys ear and then thatte hair,*”

“By the buskins you worship,” said Ug solemnly, “I know not.”

“But I do!” roared Surgard, pulling Ug’s black hair aside.

Directed by this action, Osric turned his eyes to where Ug’s ear was not, and in a moment comprehended the hooded monk’s identity with Ug.

Ug would have fled, but the vassals collected by Surgard leapt upon him, and bound him before he could resist. Then Surgard turned to his son, and addressing him in the language of the times, said, “Is it for this, thou viper, I have warmed thee in my bosom,* and nourished thee with tender care and beef tea? When thy fond father’s only delights are eating and drinking and low Saxon, wouldst thou conceal from him the existence of this fair maiden, who might nurse him and gladden his declining years. Before to-morrow shall the clarke write me a codicil, and the conventional shilling will I cut thee off withal.”

* The brute had never permitted him even as an infant to enter the parental bed.

Then turning to Ug, he continued, “And thou, slave, minion, and caitiff, knowest thou not that, for wedding without my consent, thy life and wife are confiscate? Apart from the tender claims my generosity to thee have upon thy gratitude—”

“Enough,” said Ug; “kill me.”

“Not before thou hast told me where thy wife is concealed.”

“Then let me hence, for that thou shalt never know.”

“Hence to the dungeon!”

“An thou wilt,” said Ug. He trembled as he said, “She must die, and I live. But pure shall we both be when we meet again.”

“What!” said Surgard, purple with passion; “wilt thou still conceal her?”

“Ay,” answered Ug, and spake no more.

Then Surgard stood up and tried to give his indignation vent; but it was too much for him, and epilepsy at that moment got the better of him; so he was removed to his bed in strong convulsions, whilst Ug was taken down into the coal-hole to await his lord’s

recovery and further orders. Osric tied his toothbrush up in a cotton handkerchief, and slinging it on the end of his staff, left his father's hall for good and all. It was evening when he reached the ranger's hut. He had approached it hoping, against his fear of disappointment, that he should find the lovely maiden within. But the hut was empty, and silent as the fir wood. He waited and watched at the hut-door, listening painfully. The birds discontinued their song, the stars came out one by one, and anon the moon crept through the heavens ; but no figure appeared, and the stillness was unbroken. Once in the early morning he fancied he could hear a child crying, and he called aloud, then listened, but only echo answered him. The morning came, and with it bitter disappointment to Osric. The long day succeeded, and the night appeared never to come ; but once more silence and darkness prevailed. Patiently he waited for hours, and then, unable to bear the suspense longer, he advanced to the edge of the open space, strenuously listening and looking

about. Once more he heard the childish crying, and it seemed as though it proceeded from the honeysuckles about the bole of the oak ; and thither noiselessly he moved. All was silent. He wrung his hands in despair, and was moving towards the hut, when he heard that which made his heart bound into his throat, choking him with emotion. The same sweet young voice that had rung in his memory for so long was again beside him—there, amongst the honeysuckle, singing in a trembling sad voice words he knew full well. Once Ug had told him of a beautiful winged fly that died when the sun sank, and he made a song that was supposed to be this pretty creature's dying farewell to the sun. This song he had taught Ug ; and now the voice he loved so well was singing it with a music his imagination had never heard the like of. It was not merely vanity that thrilled him with a delight too great for anything but silence. The tender voice as it trembled tearfully in its song, itself seemed to be bidding a farewell to all it loved and left. Unutterably pathetic

sounded the last note, as if all hope, all joy, all happiness died with it. A minute's stillness, then Osric moved the honeysuckle and peeped for the figure he expected lay there. Nothing could he see. Presently the little voice asked,

“Who moves the honeysuckle?”

“I,” answered Osric; believing now that really the maiden was a spirit.

“Thou art not Ug the ranger,” said the voice despairingly.

“No; but one that loves thee better than he. Where art thou?”

“I may not tell. I cannot trust thee.”

“Why?”

“Thou sayest thy love is greater than Ug’s; that is untrue.”

“I love thee, then, as truly. If thou wilt, I will lie down here and die, so great is my love for thee.”

There was a silence as if the little lady were turning this over in her mind; then Osric spake again,

“Tell me to say no more than farewell—bid

me do anything but leave the spot which is near thee, and where I may hear thy voice, and I will obey thee."

"Oh! do not leave me," pleaded the voice hurriedly.

Is it not probable the young man declared he would first perish?

"Who art thou that holdest thy life so cheap?" asked the voice.

"My life cheap now I have found thee? I would not sell it for anything but to give thee satisfaction. I am even now as fearful as the hind, fearing some accident may separate me from this sweet existence. I am Osric, the son of Surgard."

"Art thou that pretty boy I have seen in the woods?"

"I am he that fought Ug—but I am a man."

"No, Ug is a man. Thou art much lovelier to look upon than a man."

"Who art thou? Art thou a spirit capable of being visible or invisible at pleasure? or a dryad living in this tree?"

"What are dryads?"

Osic explained, and the voice replied,

“No dryads live in these woods, for everything within them is known to me. All the young fawns I know and distinguish, and they come to me when I call them by name. There is a family of young squirrels whose mother was killed by a marten ; their poor father is getting quite grey and thin with anxiety for their safety whilst he is away finding soft food for them. Do you know where there is mistletoe growing ?”

“No ; I wish thou wouldest show me.”

“Dost thou, really ?” asked the voice with much concern.

“Indeed, I do.”

“I wish I might show thee. For though thou art the son of Surgard, I do not think thou art so cruel as he. Art thou fond of the deer ?”

“Yes ; but I’m fonder still of thee !”

The voice made a little joyful cry, and then was silent. Osric too was silent, until he heard a little sob ; then he said,

“Art thou crying ?”

After a little time the voice said,
“Thou must go away. Ug has told me of
thee. I must never, never see thee!”

Another little sob after this.

“What has he said against me?”

“Less than he has said in thy favour.
Thou art kind and gentle in some things, and
art full of pretty stories and runes. That I
know, for he has taught them to me, and I
sing them all the night through. But thou
art perversely stubborn and fanatical about
twice two, and therein thou provest thyself
not innocent and good like Ug.”

“These are not evils, but rather means by
which I strive to make myself better.”

“Poor boy, thou canst not see thy own
folly. Thou art like the owls, that make
themselves the more ridiculous by trying to
look most wise.”*

“I have been foolish and wicked,” said
Osric, willing to believe himself wrong now
that *she* said so. “Do thou teach me wisdom

* Does not the ancient chronicler here satirise some
missionary or proselytising scheme of his time?

and make me good, as thou art. I do repent; indeed I do."

"If I saw thy face I should read if thou art telling the truth. Would that I might look upon thee!"

"Why mayst thou not?"

"I fear thee."

"Wilt thou not trust me in anything?"

After a silence the voice said,

"Wilt thou close thine eyes until I bid thee open them?"

"Yes; oh! yes, yes."

"Then now close them."

He closed his eyes, but his other senses were alert. He heard the honeysuckle rustle, and with its scent was mingled a scent as of sweet violets. His eyelids seemed to grow transparent, and before him his imagination pictured the lovely nymph. She appeared to be looking at him as he had last seen her—as if she were within his reach and were gazing on him, and in a moment would be gone for ever. Still he kept his eyes closed. All he could do was to hold forth his arms, and to

murmur inarticulately, yet with an expression of entreaty and prayer. Then it seemed as if a hand were laid upon his head and warm breath were on his cheek; and as he closed his arms they pressed a yielding body, an arm stole about his neck and clung there, and a cool smooth brow rested upon his face. Yet he was bewildered and thought it all a dream, spiritual and unreal; but a hand held his, and soft lips took the place of the brow and pressed his cheek. Then he said, “Tell me, who is this?”

And the well-known voice answered softly, “I am Dithe, the daughter of Ug; and I love thee better than I do the young fawns. Open thine eyes;” and as she looked into them, the pretty little maid added, “now I will trust thee.”

* * * * *

Surgard lay desperately ill. In the brief intervals between his fits he called for a clerk; but in all Mercia was no scrivener who would answer to his call; for every one knew of his treachery, and the clerk had been wanting in wisdom who ventured within reach of the

faithless Saxon. The scrivener who had drawn up the original will had certainly not complained of the payment he had received for his services ; but then Surgard had discharged his obligations in such a manner as to render complaint impossible. True, there was a complaint, and of a catching kind, that went about after the scrivener was lost sight of ; but as this was the fault of the gardener, who had not sufficiently dug in his fertiliser, no blame was attached to Surgard. Still, a bad odour hung about the place from that day, and the lawyers were careful. They “smelt a rat,” as the saying went in that day. Surgard’s codicil therefore remained unwritten. To tear up his will was worse than useless, as the primogeniture law had been made some years previously, and was as considerate of the first-born as at present. So Surgard lay there, and made himself extremely unpleasant to those about him. By entreaties and threats he tried to extort from Ug his secret ; but the ranger rather rudely spat in the old gentleman’s face. Then Surgard, who under the

circumstances felt that, having the ranger's rheum, he might dispense with his company, ordered him back to the coal-cellar and ordered hot irons for one,* to be ready for application by the time he recovered from the fit he felt coming upon him. The fit came, but recovery did not: so he died—very fitly. Then there were great rejoicings; and east and west and north and south went the servitors seeking the heir. But no heir could they find no where.† So the gardener, who was laying out the garden at the time, laid out the king also, and planted vegetable marrows over him, which was more than the

* “Than Surgarde saies, he saies, saies he,
‘Thys state of thynges sha’n’t laste;
For, ranger, thou atte presente air
A precious syghte toe fast;
Ande whanne you’ve loste yore precious syghte,’
He saies, saies he, he saies,
‘You’ll see—miraculously quite—
Ye errour of yore waires.’”

Ballad of Ug.

† This expression was considered grammatical at that time.

un-gourdly wretch deserved. Every one rejoiced with feasting and merriment.

One day, whilst they were in the midst of their feasting, a voice from the end of the hall against the hangings spake thus : “ Surgard my father, my wife and I have come to thee for food. For three weeks have we lived upon love and spring-water ; and now if thou givest us not meat and wine we must perish. For hips and haws there are none, though unripe blackberries there are in superabundance.”

He was interrupted by a ringing shout, and all his vassals came before him and greeted him with profound affection and humility, and they gazed open-eyed and open-mouthed at the beautiful wife, who nestled under his arm in fawn-like terror. When Osric heard of his father’s death, he blew his nose respectfully and was silent ; his vassals one after another blew their noses, which at that time was “ nice ” only as an outward and visible sign of an inward grace. Osric’s first question was relative to Ug, and hearing he was still preserved—though in a sorry pickle—he ordered

him to be brought from the coal-hole at once. Then he led his wife to the dais at the head of the table, and he and she sat in the big chairs, and Osric bade his wife draw down her veil. Presently Ug, all rough and unkempt, appeared before them, and the little wife grasped the arm of her husband tightly.

Ug looked around for Surgard, of whose death he was ignorant. Then he said : “Osric, thou knowest I have loved thee and served thee well.”

“ Yes,” answered Osric, “ I owe thee much ; what wouldst thou of me ? ”

“ Prythee run thy sword through my body, or suffer one of my brother villeins to do so.”

“ I cannot do this, Ug ; but I will give thee thy life and freedom if thou wilt give unto me the maiden that sings so sweetly.”

“ Sings so sweetly ! ” said Ug bitterly. “ Never more will living man hear her sing. Hear thou, and have mercy to others by the misery thou hast brought upon me and mine. She who sang so sweetly was my daughter. She was born in secret, and for sixteen years

had I hidden her. I knew if your hated father found her she would be lost ; so we lived in utter solitude and night. Thou wonderst where I hid her. Oh, you will never know. I had feared and expected what has happened, and I made my child vow never to leave her chamber alone ; and as I lay in my dungeon I knew she was slowly starving to death. Yet rather than she should fall into the hands of Surgard, I suffered her to die."

"Perhaps she did not die."

"I tell thee she is dead. Twenty long days and nights has she stayed in her living grave without food. If I held her poor thin little body in these arms, I could not be more certain she is dead. She promised she would die rather than leave her retreat alone. Even now, with torture and a miserable life before me, I would not betray her dear body for freedom or death."

"Yet thou mayst be wrong."

Ug shook his head.

"Suppose I, wandering near your hut, found the old sacred oak—"

“The oak!”

“The oak—found in it a door so cunningly wrought as to be imperceptible to some; and suppose, in a little chamber hung with pretty birds’-eggs and bright feathers, I found thy child; and suppose she consented to take me for her slave, to do what she would with all that is mine; and suppose Surgard was dead and—”

The little wife tore away her veil with a joyful scream, leapt from the daïs, and throwing herself beside the poor sobbing savage crouching on the floor, flung her arms about his neck, drew his great black head into her fair white bosom, and cried :

“Father, father, I am Dithe, thy child !”

THE END.

